

A MAN[†] WITH NO ENEMIES

Books by
URSULA TIGHE HOPKINS

THE GAME AND THE ONLOOKER
(Samuel French)

THE POOR SHADOW
(with John Croydon)

A MAN WITH NO ENEMIES

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A Novel

by

URSULA TIGHE HOPKINS

"He is no man's enemy but his own."
(Paroemiologia Anglo-Latina, 1639.)



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Also to:

The War Office.

The Clerk of the Court, Old Bailey.

Crockford's Club.

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PART ONE

Chapter One

LONG BEFORE YOU REACHED THE CONCENTRATION CAMP, you could smell it. Travelling in convoy, through the stink of lorries and the exhaust fumes, there was this other smell, elusive yet premonitory, so that you wanted to stop, put your nose to earth, hound it down and destroy what caused it. When the convoy stopped, a few miles from the camp, it was indisputable. There were other smells, the young larchwood in the bright April morning, the spicy smoke where the baby conifers had taken fire from the spilled petrol, the rich scent of the German earth, that was like all other earth: and the Smell. This was like no other. The men sniffed it, looked from one to another, and said nothing. They had known battle, and the Normandy fields after St. Lambert. But this was a smell that curled the heart: it was like the scream in a nightmare that is voiceless, the savour of things evil and of no name. That was why, as the convoy moved on again, it was not spoken of except generally and jocularly.

The camp lay out in a flat plain. It seemed significant that nothing grew near it and that the fronded crest of the forest was far on the horizon. High, exposed, and far-extending, circled by a tall wire fence, the squalid assortment of huts, tents, and shelters improvised of rags on poles resembled nothing so much, at first sight, as a grim market, some gipsy encampment on the plains of purgatory. Under the glittering arc of the blue spring sky it cast its own shadow and the smell from it was like a wall, solid, impassable.

The camp had been liberated the day previously. To get into it, meant waiting in the welter of vehicles jammed in the narrow lane alongside the wire fence. Ahead, the wire gates stood open

and a line of ambulances, bonnet to tail, were rumbling out of the camp. Here and there, the 'typhus' boards were up.

Jan Hegen, war correspondent of the *Record* and elder son of its owner, shifted his cramped position in the jeep and turned to stare through the wire netting. Scarcely two arms' lengths away, his placid eyes met those of one of the camp's inmates, a youngish man who was squatting with a group of other prisoners watching the activity through the cage of wire. In the prisoner's cold stare there was something that was shocking to an outsider, accustomed to the aspect of ordinary human sentiments. These were killer's eyes. The other men were the same. Their yellow, unshaven, prominently-boned faces admitted no disclosure of emotion. They were like people turned to stone, who could feel nothing. If they were not here, Jan thought, they would be locked up somewhere else.

"It stinks, they said. But my God, they were right!" Major Hartz had a high-pitched wearing voice and Jan was tired of it. Americans talked too much.

"Forty thousand prisoners," commented Pat Nason, who was reporting for Dublin's *Tribune*, "and most of them dying, they say. Typhus. There's a big job of burying yet."

"That's obvious."

"Forty thousand? Who gave you the figures? Is there a record?" Major Hartz's voice was shrill.

"You can get an idea." Nason shrugged.

"Ideas won't inform the next-of-kin."

"They're all here, probably." Jan had shared the jeep with Major Hartz over some two hundred miles, during which journey he had been exhaustively apprised of the mysteries, the excellencies, the total hair-splitting efficiency of the records system of the American armies. To Major Hartz, the liberated and the conquered, the displaced and the dying, were matters to be attacked with a full pen and boxes and boxes of virgin record cards: for until a fact was recorded, it did not exist.

The jeep jolted forward, turned in at the camp gates, and came to a halt with a bump. There was a lorry ahead of it and behind was a large camouflaged car with the lines of a Cadillac. Jan

thought it was like trying to find parking space at a Cup Final. Somewhere in the middle of the hut compounds, a hut was blazing. You could hear it crackling and smoke from it was unrolling like a black flag across the blue.

"Burning the huts," observed Nason, "I bet they're foul."

"There's Division H.Q." Hartz pointed and set off with determination in the direction of the sign.

"He's after the Facts . . ." said Nason to Jan with a grin.

"Aren't you?"

"In my way. Think I'll push off . . ."

"Good," said Jan, who wanted to do the same thing. "See you here later, then."

A kind of rough, rutted road led through the centre of the camp, but, apart from the fact that it was crowded with transport, Jan wanted to see the activity in the midst and at the back of the camp. He decided to cut across it, diagonally.

Jan Hegen was a big man of about forty-three with heavy bowed shoulders. His face was pale and blunt, still retaining a chubbiness about the cheek-bones. It contained the paradox seen sometimes in the baby-faces of youthful killers, where ruthlessness and placidity conspire to brutal purpose; but Jan's was a paradox of mind and physical flesh and muscle, injecting force and calm into contours that would always be rotund and childish. Under his cap his eyes were grey, calm and silvery, and his mouth was calm. He wore his battle-dress untidily. He was not a man who considered his appearance.

Round the corner of a hut in front of Jan came a man. He was clad in a single filthy shirt which contained his bones as it might the props of a scarecrow. Beneath the tattered hem appeared the man's bare spindle-legs and bony feet. He moved ahead of Jan with the shuffling, tottering walk of the very old. His arms and legs, Jan saw, were covered with ulcers. Jan caught up with him, thinking to ask him a question or two. But when he met the eyes under the fluff of grey-white hair, he remained silent.

The man was not old. In this compound there were people of all ages, men and women and children, withered, broken,

diseased, done for. Some merely sat, or lay, waiting for death. But where there was still life, their eyes met Jan's as from across a no-man's land of experience that he realised neither he nor any outsider could expect to cover. He stood among them, helplessly, the notebook in his hand, and felt ashamed for his own race, unworthy of the clothes on his back or the food in his stomach.

As he walked on through the camp and saw the conditions that had made these people what they were now, Jan had to struggle against an invading sense of evil. The things that he saw, shook the foundations of his civilised world. His mind was not prepared to deal with this calculated degradation of ordinary people.

Despite the strong sunlight, it was as though a shadow lay over the camp, an intangible malevolence that darkened everything. Jan felt it like a miasma, getting into his hair, his skin, his mind, so that it seemed that no matter how he bathed he would never again be clean. He thought, if you felt like this after only a few hours in the place, how would it be if you'd lived here? You could get the people out, burn everything to the ground, sterilise the land itself. But you could never cleanse the memory.

At the back of the camp, near the chalk quarries, lay the unburied dead. It was as though they had been tipped out of a monster sack to lie in this mound, this mountain of human refuse with the white limbs sticking out of it like the bones of some vast carcass after the vultures had been.

The pile was about fifty yards long and twenty feet high. Jan stood at the edge of it, among the other silent spectators. For the moment, he could feel nothing. His mind balked at the magnitude of the spectacle, refusing the pity that even one poor corpse, discovered alone, might have evoked. And for a dreadful instant, he understood how this could have come about, if you ceased to consider the individual and saw only the body, the numerous tiresome obstructive bodies, that refused to die and when they finally were dead had somehow, somewhere, to be disposed of. . . .

A few days before, these bodies had been living and walking

about, these frames so wasted that not only flesh but muscle had withered on the bone. Now they were empty. It was not they who were defeated, thought Jan, but their enemies. For you could not conquer or destroy the spirit which was not there.

Jan stood under the high, brilliant sky in the bright white light that the sun struck from the chalk, and watched the gargantuan task of clearing up. The bulldozers had scored a vast pit in the chalk and into this the S.S. guards were throwing the bodies.

Beside another pit, an army chaplain was reading the burial service. At the edge of the pit, he was silhouetted in the white light, the purple ribbon round his neck with its gold crucifix blowing in the wind. He looked young, plump and unviolated, his face composed and suitably solemn after the manner of clergy when reading the last rites over those whom they have not lost. His words came clearly, "Lord let me know mine end . . ." Jan turned from the pit and walked away. It was surely the last mercy, that men should not know their end, or the number of their days.

Jan walked slowly back to the camp. A heavy nausea dragged in him, as though his mind had taken a poison from the things it had seen and a mortal sickness was spreading to his body. 'Yet it's over,' he thought dourly, 'it's broken . . .' He felt his resistance strengthen. 'This isn't going to get me,' he thought, 'it'll get some. But not me.'

Jan thought of his readers, the near four million of the *Record's* circulation, who would unfold their papers tomorrow with strong healthy hands, covered with whole firm flesh. What would they make of what he would tell them? But the kindly emotions of comfortable people could never equal the violating pity and outrage of those who had seen these things for themselves.

Of what use was pity? Or outrage? Only the incoming ambulances, the relief supplies of food, water, clothing, were useful. And even these things could not help the minds of those who had survived.

There was a woman sitting beside the step at the open door of one of the huts. Absorbed in his thoughts, Jan turned the corner

so sharply that he almost fell over her. He tripped, stumbled, recovered himself. "I'm sorry!" he exclaimed automatically, and turned, "*ich bedauere sehr.*" He paused, knowing no Czech or Russian.

Jan felt as apologetic as though he had deliberately walked over her, this faint shadow of life. She was leaning back against the hut side, her legs drawn up slightly, her hands relaxed weakly in her lap. Her eyes were closed, the bones in her face sharply exposed, broad bones with high cheek-bones, as though her face had once been rounded. Her hair was cropped. The whole of her, blouse and skin and hair, seemed of the same indeterminate dirty grey-brown. For a moment, Jan wondered if she were dying, or already dead. She had the air of some marionette, with broken strings, propped carelessly aside. Then, as he hesitated, her head turned and her eyes opened, uncannily green.

"English," she said, in a tone of recognition. The soft precise voice spoke, out of disorder, of culture and cool measured affairs. It had more identity than the spectral eyes which seemed to have forgotten the facts of their own existence. "An Englishman."

"An Englishwoman." Jan deferred to the voice. At best, Englishwomen were a tradition, a way of dressing, of looking, of thinking. They turned up everywhere in the world, whether young and famed of complexion or elderly and unbeatable, compelling of respect. They had the intuitive royalty of their nationality. This was an Englishwoman, this bag of rags on enemy soil. "What part do you come from?" he asked, and stooped to catch the faint voice.

Her eyes sought the blunt pug-like face with its pale quiescent eyes. "You look English," she remarked vaguely. Jan repeated, "Where do you come from?" One of her hands moved. "Don't come close. I'm crawling. I've had typhus." The silvery peaceful eyes looked into hers. She saw that he did not move away. "Who are you?" he asked.

Her eyes closed again as though she had not the strength to keep them open. He saw that she was quite young. He repeated, "Who are you? Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you."

"Does anyone know you're here?" She did not answer. Her head fell weakly to one side.

Jan got up quickly and went to the hut door and looked inside. From the black interior, the stench sprang at him like a wild thing and he drew back. But he could tell that the hut was empty. He went back to the girl. "I'll fetch someone."

"Don't." Her head moved. She looked at him.

"Why not?"

"I'm dying."

Some instinct told Jan that it was not true, that she was not dying. He was divided between remaining with her, if it were true, and going for help if she could yet be saved. He took out his notebook. "Who are you?" he demanded more firmly, "give me your address."

Her eyes opened again. Jan saw that they were the colour of a leaf, with yellowish flecks: not stable. They confirmed his theory that her will was weaker than her body.

There were ghosts in the green eyes, of places and people that had once existed, phantoms, never to be found again. She answered his question. "Four, Maida Rise, St. John's Wood."

It was not a mile from where Jan himself lived. He knew the road, a short incline of sunny early-Victorian villas in a part of London where the gardens were deepest. Were her thoughts there now, in a clean bed in some room where the windows touched the limes? Or did this place possess her? He wrote quickly. "And your name?"

"Adele Forrest." She spoke of herself as of some stranger, scarcely remembered. "I was an artist. I lived with my father and mother. Father was an artist, too. Mother was French. Father said that was enough . . ." The little glimpse of home went away, it was too far off, she couldn't see it and it didn't matter, anyway, she was too weak to get there.

Jan stared with clouded eyes at the closed ashen face. He did not want her to die. He did not want to have to tell those Bohemian-sounding parents of how their child had died, in this hell-pit, with her eyes the only colour left in her.

Yet the doubt persisted, that she was sinking merely because

she had not the will to take hold on life. "*Adele!*" he called her suddenly. Her eyes opened at once to her name. "*The camp's open!*" he said, loudly and strongly, "the Americans are here. *You're going home! . . .*"

Jan held his breath. Her eyes were like some pale tide far out on the horizon. Would it turn? He waited for several seconds. Then, in the distance, he saw a brightening. "Home," she said, "home." And Jan knew that she would get there.

Jan had resisted the camp. He intended to think it out quietly, from a distance, and then try to put it from his mind for all time. But as his jeep, with a carrotty-faced corporal at the wheel, racketed from the turbulent lane on to the straight road in the evening sunshine, he wished he had his own powerful car, to feel the wheel under his own hands and the miles flashing behind him. He would drive over the rim of the earth to get away from the place. He was not thinking about the notebook in his pocket, and the address it contained.

Chapter Two

THE DRAWING-ROOM OF JAN'S LONDON HOME had once been the servants' hall. It had been designed by Lorely, Jan's wife. At least, when they decided to leave their top flat in Adelphi early in the war, she had called in an interior decorator. She had stood with him in the grim dungeon that had been this room and listened while he talked of scale, mass, proportion, light, colour, and many another matter of which she understood little. There was a dream in her mind of which this man, with his dull and unimportant considerations was merely the servant.

Anything might have started it: a passage of music, perhaps, or a painting, a length of sea-coloured fabric, or the atmosphere of some novel. Whatever it was, Lorely was under a kind of green enchantment, her mind was coloured of the sea, and she longed for the visual expression of her fancy in sea colours all around her, ultramarine dark, iridescent with light, stained with jade and emerald as she had seen the sea one summer morning from the

rocks off Castellamare.' Through this sea-dream Lorely herself moved, her splendid body sheathed in mermaid creations, an enchantress of far-away, faery seas: there was a poem about it but she'd forgotten what it was. Having unburdened herself of the essential vision she departed for the country, leaving the designer, that uninspired man, to get on with the details.

When Lorely came back, this room was in being. Translucently green, agleam with satin and fired with cut-glass, it was mirrored in the whole expanse of two of its walls. On the back of the mirror-sheets had been painted a design of underwater plants, reedy and frail, climbing to the wavy line of the wall canopy. The remaining walls and carpet were of pale aqueous tints. The window, formerly a narrow barred slit high in the wall, was covered by a slatted blind that dropped to the ground and was graced by luminous ninon curtains, pale as sap, held back by heavy glass chains. By night, the window was hidden by a fall of sea-green satin. There was no suggestion that the same window was wired within and sandbagged without. This room, brittle and illusory, had nothing to do with war. This afternoon, on an antique Empire couch curved like the prow of a boat and upholstered in the same pelagic satin, lay Lorely herself.

Lorely had not been christened by that name. Her mother had called her Brigid, as all the first-born girls in her family had been called. Lorely had chosen the more romantic name when she left school and had successfully imposed it upon her life from that time, though never upon her mother to whom she remained Brigid to the end. Yet there was in Lorely more of the daughters Brigid from far Ballynahill in the west of Ireland, than of the quiet Berkshire schoolmaster who was her father. She had the eyes of the Spanish corsair ancestor, that had looked out from generation after generation of the Lennan women; enormous, sombre eyes, greyish-black like the smudges in a charcoal drawing, against a skin that, in Lorely, had the whiteness of paper and yet was clear and plastic with health and indolent living. Her face was beautifully moulded, firm and soft and rather broad, without a flaw in its proud proportioning. Her

hair, severely restrained in glossy smoothness over her broad head, still betrayed a Latin inclination to curl tightly at the temples; it was black, with a blue sheen not her own, and had never been cut. In body, Lorely was strong, tall and lithe and vital. She could have pulled a cart or raised twenty children; instead, her life paralleled that of those far-away peasants who sat around their peat fire drinking tea at all hours, who slept late, fished from the sea on their doorstep, and worked not at all.

Not working could be a tiring business. That morning, Lorely had undergone a facial and a shampoo, and had lunched with the wife of an acquaintance of Jan's, a woman whom she scarcely knew, who did something voluntary and zealous in the Red Cross. They had lunched in the war workers' canteen at the National Gallery, where a pass was required and the food and coffee had something of a reputation. Lorely evaded patriotic gatherings as a rule, but this time she found herself pressed in a close throng, carrying a small tray, and expected to wedge herself in at a table with other zealous and patriotic people and to enthuse over a very small *vol-au-vent* and an even smaller morsel of Spanish cream. Lorely had a good appetite and most of her food came, not entirely lawfully, from the family farm. In addition to feeling empty, she felt herself bored into by keen eyes, buffeted by good intentions, oppressed by uniforms, pips, crowns, wings, all the insignia of a conflict in which she had no part and no interest. It had been most exhausting. She came home, changed her dress three times, and now she lay at peace in an oyster-white woollen dress girdled by a scarlet whip, and listened to the palliative air of a favourite barcarolle. Lorely took music as some people took drugs. Anæsthetised by melody, she gave herself up. The phone rang. . . .

It was Jan. Into the silence after she switched off the radio-gram, his rich, hard voice came like a cymbal-clash. Difficult as he was, when he was home, he made an end to her days, he was something to mark time with. The past three weeks had run together, had seemed all one. "Darling," she said, in her soft slow voice, "where are you?"

"In a call-box in the Strand. I'll be home in under an hour."

"Oh, in London? . . . her voice slowed up.

"You didn't think I was in Europe? I'm not Churchill . . ."

"No, I—— When did you get here?"

"Around midday,"—it was five o'clock,—"I'm just about straightened out."

"You've been home hours," she accused him, "I could have made plans."

"For me? You don't want to do that."

Didn't she? Not with several hours and something at the end of them to look forward to, to dress for, think about? She'd so little to think about. Now that time was gone, it was all a rush. She tried to cheer herself.

"Did you bring me anything?"

Jan shifted the stuffy receiver in the airless call-box. You'd think he'd been to the Riviera. Yet he could have picked up something as a memento to show he'd thought of her, if only a piece of valueless *bijouterie* from a Belgian village. Such little things pleased her: so little, you forgot them. Now, what to say? "There isn't anything you'd like, where I've been."

"Where have you been?"

"Hell."

Loirely was startled. Jan never told her anything about his life and this word had the spontaneity of truth. Her heart warmed suddenly. "How dreadful," she said indignantly, "they shouldn't send you to those places, you're not a soldier. Complain. Make them——"

Jan cut her short. "Don't be silly. I choose my job. No on 'makes' me."

She couldn't understand. If he chose his job, why did he say it was hell? And he needn't jump on her like that.

Jan felt her silence. He wanted to apologise but it was all too difficult. "I'm hot," he said instead, "I need a long bath."

Food, baths, the body's needs; these she understood. "You shall," she responded, "stay in it all the evening. Have dinner in bed. No one's coming."

"Better put an extra chair in the bathroom, in case."

"Poor love," she said, feeling happier, "you'll be glad to get home." After all, she was his home.

Lorely sat still for a moment after Jan rang off. All those hours and he'd never rung her. Just a word when he arrived, to show he'd thought of her first. What a difference. There he was, her husband, her mate, her nearest, doing things in the world of which she knew nothing, meeting people she'd never know. What did he think of her, his wife? What did she mean to him? She should be written on his heart, like Calais on the heart of Mary. That was a piece of history she remembered because it was real, the true thought of someone who'd lived as she, Lorely, was living now. History was about so many people, dead people. Only the living mattered, and then only those you knew and could think about, one at a time. Jan thought of so many things; all the world mattered to him except his wife, who should matter most. *My lovely* . . . he used to call her . . . she'd mattered then, only it was so long ago, about fourteen years, since her phone had rung, excitingly, constantly, with the certainty of daybreak, no matter where he was, or what the hour. When did he begin to forget her? What had she done? What happened to people when they changed? It was worse than death, they were still there and yet not there. If you went on looking, perhaps you would find them again. The new brown velvet dress . . . it lay in its box in her room, unopened, having no interest for her, no purpose in her life. Now she could wear it. She swung her legs to the ground. *My lovely*, she thought, *my lovely*.

Lorely revolved slowly and contentedly in the big mirror in her bedroom. The velvet dress was perfect. It masked her closely, flowing in heavy folds at her feet, the pointed cuffs lapping her fingers. Only the deep curve of her breast was bare, the bloom of the blackish-brown pile heightening her white skin and profound eyes. A mellow fire burned in the topaz stones at her ears and throat. It was only six o'clock but there was no suggestion in this room of the cold spring evening outside. Here it was always day, or night, as Lorely wished it. Jan spoke.

"Is there a party?"

Lorely turned. Jan stood in the doorway in his drab khaki, his pale impassive face smudged with fatigue, his forehead marked with the line of his cap. As always, with the reality of him, some of the colour left her life. He was so colourless, not . . . not there. Would he never come to her again? She spread her arms with a dim sense of unveiling herself. Wasn't she a woman for any man to come home to? "Like it?" she asked.

Did he like it? Jan came into the room and looked dutifully and carefully at the dress. "Velvet, is it?" he discovered. Lorely carried any dress like a queen. If he said so? . . . no, it would imply too much, more than he felt, it wasn't honest, to excite her. An old disquiet stirred, making him more tired. She wasn't happy and he knew it. "Very nice indeed," he added, "who's coming?"

Lorely went to him and slipped her hands across his back, feeling the heavy familiar muscles. "He's come," she said.

So it was for him, the dress, the jewels, at six in the evening. He rested his hands on her arms but the velvet pile set his teeth on edge. He moved his hands to her neck, kissed the fragrant cheek. "Want to go out?" She started to unbutton his tunic as a mother would. "As if I'd go out, with you just home and wanting a bath and some quiet. Get undressed, and I'll run it for you." Jan looked down at her smooth round head bent over the buckle of his belt. She was nicest when he was tired, bodily, that was. "That's a very nice dress," he said, solicitously, "you should have kept it . . ."

"Should I?" Lorely looked up at Jan and he saw as a kind of weakening in her dark eyes, the pathos of her thoughts. Why, indeed, shouldn't she wear it for him if she wanted? "Whose coupons this time?" he asked, and went over to the wardrobe, away from her nearness, her perfume, the indefinable hope of her.

"No coupons," her voice was ripe with triumph, "not one."

"How's that?" Jan hung away his jacket.

"It's a curtain. From one of the attic trunks . . ."

"Father's trunks? I hope you asked him first?"

"It was full . . . brocade, velvet, miles of it. . . ." The dull

afternoon, the big brass-studded trunk like a chest spilling its treasure of stuffs in an excess of plunder, exciting, unbelievable. "This was a dirty pink," she explained. "I had it dyed. Some were too heavy, like wearing carpets."

"I remember those curtains. In the nursery . . ." Jan felt better in the old Shetland dressing-gown with its clean woolly smell. He felt in the pocket for the cigarettes he kept there. "Yes, they'd rows of braiding, two, like a railway track. I used to watch it run off the edge. . . ."

"You won't do that again."

"No." Lorely watched Jan as he sat heavily in an arm-chair and lighted his cigarette. She pictured the child Jan running his imaginary trains over the curtains; pale-faced, enigmatic, then as now. What did he ever think about?

Jan was thinking of the heavy pile of the house above them, the enormous bare rooms, the darkening windows. Who would live in it again? "This place would make a club," he said, "or a school. In father's place, I'd put it up for sale."

"Sell the house? But it's wonderful."

"Is it?"

"Those immense rooms . . . you can move in them. If it were done up, all white, light, your father never had enough light . . . and the drawing-room, you could make a proper terrace, with lanterns outside . . . open the little gallery again, with a band there."

"My dear, when?"

"After the war."

"When's that?"

Was he laughing at her? "A few months."

"There isn't going to be an 'end of the war'. There wasn't with the last one. The fighting stopped. But not the decline in standards."

"Don't talk like that! Of course it'll end! We'll have food again, I know, and clothes, and petrol, be able to do what we like, go abroad."

"You could have a fine holiday on the battlefields."

"There're plenty of places that aren't battlefields."

"It'll be a long time before you get to them."

"I'll get there, some time." Lorely sat down at her dressing-table and wrenched off her ear-rings. She must change, this dress wasn't right, the evening wasn't what she'd expected. Nothing ever was, with Jan. "It's terrible," she declared, "all this gloom. Everything getting less and less, and the papers so pleased about it you daren't open your mouth. If more people grumbled, the war would have been over long ago."

"But not in the way you'd like." Jan's voice was icy, "I wish you'd think, Lorely."

"How rude you are! You've no idea of the real problems of life."

"What are the 'real problems'?"

"The home, first, keeping it beautiful and oneself, and, and not forgetting the way one used to be."

"Beauty treatments?"

"It's hard, you don't know." Lorely turned to Jan and thought of the continual struggle, the daily, almost hourly care that made her the woman he knew. You couldn't get the creams and lotions, the ones she used to use came from France, and her perfume. The years were going by, her skin might be spoiling for what she couldn't give it. "We're growing old," she said, "while we talk War." Her eyes appealed to him. "Stop this talk, they said, it confuses. There's no confusion in loving. I can love, but I cannot think."

Jan saw this look in his wife's eyes; he'd seen it before, when they tried to talk. But a sense of injustice, a definite distant anger, held back his response. He sat forward, planted his elbows on his knees. "In Germany," he said, deliberately, "there's a camp. I've seen it. Men, women, children, without water, without sanitation, without food; eating grass, eating each other. I should think, forty thousand of them; and millions who died before them, and millions more, in other camps, you'll see."

Lorely's eyes rounded. "No water?" she repeated, "no water at all?"

"No water. Blood."

"But you can't wash in, oh! but why? Why do they let them, places like that? Can't someone do something?"

"Do what?" Jan would not spare her.

"Well, rise up, refuse to be treated like that. You said there were, how many? Thousands, millions of them. They could have a revolution."

"Against the Reich? You should have seen them."

"Peasants, I suppose. They're low, primitive. Probably they don't care."

"They're not all peasants. And peasants feel."

"Not like we do." Lorely was losing interest. She turned again to the mirror, reaching for the zip at the back of her dress. "They sleep on top of their stoves all the winter, and don't wash at all. I read that. Having no water wouldn't worry them. Can you do my zip?"

Jan stood up. "You have no imagination at all."

Lorely stared at him in the crystal-framed triple mirror. "And who looks after your home, if I've no imagination? It's all got to be thought of, planned, imagined," she swallowed.

"It's for yourself."

"It's for us, for you as well as me, all of it, all I do. I think of you," her voice thickened, "you only think of strangers."

"I think of the world we live in."

"Except me! except me." She stood up, went towards him. Words came, momentarily coherent, so often had she thought them. "People say you're wonderful, in your plays they say you understand, you love people. They don't see how you treat your wife! Charity begins at home."

"I'm trying to tell you something that's going to be talked about, written about. History."

"All I've done, the hours I've thought, planned; people say it's remarkable what I've done; you don't think so, it's you've no imagination, always thinking of things outside, nothing to do with us."

"You and I are part of our times. They're an adventure, grim, but exciting. Am I not to know, not to be interested, because you say so?"

"What difference would it make, what I say? You don't hear me, see me, remember me."

Lorely's eyes were dead embers, charred, crumbling . . . it was bad for her to burn herself out like this, he shouldn't let her. She couldn't understand anything. Why make her try? Jan went close to her. She was almost as tall as he was, but to him she seemed a child. "You don't think of the sun," he said, "but you notice when it stops shining. Of course I remember you." Was it true? Never mind, he must say it. "I know you think of me. You're very good . . ." Her eyes stirred, like smoke. "Do you miss me?" she asked.

"No, because you're here. But I would, if you weren't." He turned her around. "This zip, how far does it go?"

Lorely felt his lips on her bare shoulder. What had they been saying? She couldn't remember. "I've had a terrible day," she declared, "with Mrs. Thackeray. She expects me to work in the Red Cross . . ."

"The Red Cross manages without you."

"I wish you'd tell her. She's a terrible woman. She wore navy serge, just like a gym slip."

Lorely turned to Jan, confident, full of small disclosures. Like this, she was lovable, malleable. Jan never rowed with anyone but Lorely. Why? She was an unsolved problem of himself, a sum that never came out. Where did he slip up? She had merely wanted, what was it? To talk about her dress, the curtains, her affairs. To agree, that was it. Why couldn't he do it more often?

Jan lay in his bath and thought about women. Green water steamed round his ears, a shampoo lacquered his head, his enormous feet, he was long for the bath, arrayed the bath-taps like seaweed. This was himself, with the lid off. His mind, as well.

Women: if you understood people, you could handle them. So it was said. That depended. Emotion confused, especially old emotion. It was like hacking out of a jungle, thickened and tangled by time and misunderstanding. When you did get clear,

it was too late: there was only tomorrow, to be quicker, more wary, better armed. Tomorrow he would try again to be kind to Lorely.

Being kind, not trying to change her. Nothing existed for her outside her own experience: just as, conversely, he himself absorbed and recreated all experience with which he came in contact. Experience was common property: some had more, others less, but it was the same stuff. Experience was like the body in embryo, everything was there, it had only to grow. Some grew slowly, hardly at all; others were abortive, the suicides, throwers-up of sponges. Their time would come. Nothing was immutable, given enough time. You'd come from somewhere and, surely, were going somewhere. You borrowed a body, wore it for a while. Then it fell away. Before long there was another. You could try again, in the new overcoat, with all the people you'd known before, in theirs. You couldn't always make the same mistakes. You wouldn't tell your wife she'd no imagination: it needed imagination to know that. You'd think for a year, two years, before you took a wife. You could think for ever, and still wish you hadn't done it. What was a wife? Not the individual you got engaged to, but a presence, a third person developed out of days, nights, years of association. Hope made marriages: time made wives. Then it was done: the years were there. And the tomorrows.

Why think of Lorely as she was when he married her? A person who never existed; a hope in himself, of a mind to match the body and the kind heart? Why be angry with her for not being the person he ordered? Some men would send her back. But there were the nights, the first, and many more, the white satin ribbon that tied back the dark hair: sometimes it lay neatly folded beneath the pillow; at others, it turned up, neat and frustrated, at the foot of the bed. He'd remember that: only it couldn't command your life, a white ribbon. Or could it? It was like the man who, asked what was wrong with his marriage, said after long thought: her teeth stick out. True, they stuck out; but that wasn't grounds for a divorce.

You could look elsewhere for what you lacked. But you got it

in pieces, a face here, a body there, a mind somewhere else. They were best left at that, the flare and the promise, without the fading and the cold morning. You'd a wife: the rest was trouble.

Mrs. Carew lifted the lid of the chicken *fricassée* with reverence, not for her own art, but for the laws that brought to such smooth accord the separate and joyless constituents of her pantry. The *velouté* sauce, like its name, was velvety, of a quiet savour; in it were the broth of chicken, cream, egg yolk, lemon juice, mace, peppercorns, and other mysteries, among them the sleight of hand of Mrs. Carew; of that raw knobbly hand that was always cold. It had conjured also the weightless crescents of golden pastry that lay on the warm rack; the rolls of grilled bacon, the mushrooms, the green peas, the new potatoes browning in butter in the oven. Simple food, cunningly unspoiled. There would be more cunning in the omelette *soufflée* to follow, when the whites were folded into the yolks with the *kirsch* and the whole mass rose, unbelievably, in the hot omelette pan; then, the hot raspberry jam, the sugar dusting, and a word to Louie to hurry when she took it in. It was a pity the omelette *soufflée* couldn't go in on roller skates. . . .

Mrs. Carew was whisking the egg-whites now. Under her white coat, her hips mounted her long bony legs like mare's haunches; her ankles were hocks; her wrists fetlocks; the chef's hat over the long face would be better replaced by a flat straw with two slits for the ears to come through. Mrs. Carew's two middle front teeth were very long, imprisoning her underlip in a permanent snarl; not being a mare's, they were of great whiteness but were now painstakingly obscured lest a breath should whistle upon her handiwork.

The door opened and Jan came in. Mrs. Carew looked up and her mouth drew back in its habitual harmless savagery. Her eyes were yellow, the gold of country wine. She liked the master. He was a strong man and she was a strong woman. She was safe. Not even buck teeth could save a strong woman from a weak man. Like her Frank. She bent over the whites again, blinkering her teeth.

"Hullo, Mrs. Carew," Jan observed the equine disapproval, "how are you doing?"

"Do I differ, Mr. Jan? Sometimes I've more time . . ."

"Come, come! Emergency tests the expert."

"I'm past my exams. We could have had a roast, and a coffee charlotte russe."

"We'll have it tomorrow. What's this?" Jan lifted a lid. "It couldn't smell better."

"Chicken *fricassée*. And there's a sweet omelette, with kirsch."

"We'll open a bottle of Pol Roger '37. It's a banquet! Lack of time incites you, Mrs. Carew. If you were a dancer, you'd dance on a drum."

Louie, the parlourmaid, poured maraschino over the grapefruit and listened, her thin middle-aged breast warming. A man in the house was like the roof on it, something final and secure.

Unnoticed, Lorely stood in the doorway. She had changed to a dark red dress with a point d'Alençon collar. She was watching Jan. Under the light his mouse-coloured hair had a fair sheen and he looked warm and well. Here were warmth, brightness, good food. What had their kind to do with concentration camps, and people who washed in blood?

Chapter Three

JAN COULD NOT FORGET THE GIRL he had found in the concentration camp. He kept remembering how he had called her back to life, had seen her safely on to a stretcher and into the ambulance. She would live, he was sure. Yet he continued to reflect upon how she came to be in the camp at all and, still more, how she had survived unless she had been taken there recently from some prison? Jan supposed that, as an artist, she might have been caught in Paris by the German occupation. After that, heaven knew what she had got up to. Yet he desired to hear her story because he felt that, somehow, he was a part of it. . . .

The concentration camp was still front-page news. As Jan walked down the Strand in the soft spring morning, he wondered

what these bustling preoccupied strangers had made of the reports. Jan thought it would not mean much to anyone who had not been there. There had been so many headlines: the blitz, the disasters at sea, Normandy, the doodle-bugs. Each week, it seemed, there was a train smash. These things were nearer home. The far-away horrors of the camp would come under the protective heading of things that could only happen to other people. None of these readers would realise how nearly the evil had gibbered over their own heads in the days when defeat had been near. For what could happen to one, could happen to all.

The offices of the *Record* presented a massive and deceptively narrow front to Fleet Street. In their reinforced depths, Jan's father had his war-time headquarters. He argued that they made a substantial fortress; and should the building come down, there would be no delay in notifying him.

His sanctum had now been moved to the first floor, where a lately enlarged daylight filled it from the ravaged courts between Fleet Street and Holborn. As with the unimposing frontage, this room gave no impact of the power latent in the *Record's* vast circulation, or the wealth it brought its owners. The large panelled room was dominated by a massive mahogany desk, a late Georgian piece that had belonged to Lord Cluer's father. On it were still the brass-mounted rosewood inkstand he had used, and a pair of rosewood miniature bookcases containing an edition of *The Decameron Nights*. A Turkoman carpet in rust and blue and brown covered the floor. On the walls, in dulling frames, were a Holbein, and a Pieter de Hooch interior.

Nathaniel Hegen, Viscount Cluer, was the descendant of emigrant Dutch printers who had settled in the vicinity of Holborn viaduct in the late seventeen-seventies. Of those two brothers, their enterprise, persistent toil, and faith, there remained this frail man, agnostic, sybarite, egoist, who carried the financial statements of a small empire in his memory and whose pointed colourless face and silvering head were those of the courtier rather than of the artisan. He sat with his straight back to the big latticed window, Continental and un-English in his English

cloth, a gleam of gold in his silk cuffs and in his sober tie. He lifted dark undulled eyes as Jan came in.

"Well, Jan," his father said, "how are you? I was waiting for you."

Jan knew that his father regarded him with the amused pity of the materialist for one who attacks a material world with abstractions. As a boy, he had resented the amusement without understanding the pity. Now, if he was not careful, his father's pity made him angry. He pulled up a chair, guarding his reply. "Very fit," he said, "not sorry to be back, of course."

"This camp," Nathaniel said equably, "seems to have given a lot of people a great shock. I can't agree."

"You didn't see it."

"How many have? Exterminating one's enemies is nothing new. Nazi Germany had many enemies."

"These were hardly dangerous. I saw a number of babies."

"Babies are dangerous. They grow up. All people are dangerous who don't agree with you, if you're a Nazi."

"Are you justifying this?" Jan was not sure. "Go and see it, walk through it, smell it."

"That's your work," Nathaniel smiled. "No, I merely contest this surprise, this dismay, this naïve civilised offence. The Englishman, the American, loves to say he progresses. It sounds well, and it's true of some people. But there are others, who do not progress. The balance does not change. Here, murder is outlawed. There, it is received. That is the only reason why our enemies have concentration camps, and we have not."

"There's more to it than that."

"Not much. It's bestial, yes. But much of this righteous outcry, nationally speaking, is hypocritical."

"If people spoke as nations. They don't. They think for themselves. They believe——" Jan stopped. Why be drawn into an ideological discussion? It was like a game that neither could win. Bad for both.

"To believe in anything is to invite shock." A gleam came into Nathaniel's eyes. Jan saw it. "Your readers should be we.

prepared," he said swiftly, "especially after this morning's leader."

"My heretical views, Jan, would not be favoured by our readers."

"I'm read as a historian only, I hope. You know my views on journalism." Jan smiled as he spoke, the bland sweet smile that stressed rather than softened his blunt obdurate features.

"I know you want more space."

"You could give me the whole paper, both sheets, and I still would not be happy. I don't like lifting the lace curtain on people's private lives. The reports are never complete, never wholly true. Reporting the war's another matter."

"Ah, Jan, you want to tell everything. It is what is not told that people want to hear. For which they pay to hear more."

"I prefer to leave it. Our kind of journalism makes a public spectacle out of private trouble."

Nathaniel shrugged. "If people make news."

"Someone's misfortune is always news. Particularly to the *Record*."

"One shouldn't have misfortunes . . ."

There was the old amusement in his father's eyes. Jan withdrew, out of its reach. "It's no good. I hate publicity. I value my own privacy too highly to wish to violate anyone else's."

"You'll end on the front page, Jan."

"Not till I'm dead, I hope."

Nathaniel could afford his amusement. "It's fortunate I have another son. I'd tremble to leave the *Record* in your hands."

"I'd tremble to own it. I'm not worthy." There was a trace of irony in the words. In Jan's eyes the *Record* might be little more than a dish-rag; but it was nonetheless the achievement of his fathers, a powerful organ of popular opinion and, that unavailable thing, a commercial success. If Jan had children, he might have thought gravely before he alienated himself from the paper. But Jan and Lorely were childless. Everett, his younger brother, had two sons; he was, moreover, as much his father's son as Jan was the child of his mother.

The buzzer on Nathaniel's desk rang and while his father was engaged, Jan considered again his father's marriage to the girl who had died in the hunting field when Jan was three. Her portrait was over the fireplace in the drawing-room at Cluer, a tall, strong girl in a riding habit, snub-nosed, with Jan's calm mouth and clear undissembling eyes. She had been a lady, a Berkshire Everett, a countrywoman to the core. Nathaniel was urban, a sophisticate, whose conversations were not so much an exchange of opinion as a verbal sword-play, an acknowledged sport. What had they in common? Was it that Nathaniel built his family tree with the same care that he built his business? Nanny, who had Everett from the month, said that they were happy, that Nathaniel honoured and was proud of his wife. Why, then, did he not love the son who resembled her? Jan had always felt that his father was laughing at him. With him, as a child, he felt lumpy and over-large. As he grew older his outspokenness, however shrewd, was turned to gaucherie; and now, they were antagonists—honourably and dutifully matched, but in opposition. Had it been an error? Whose? How little you knew of the people who gave you life.

If he himself had a son. Jan had tried and failed to visualise the fact. When he and Lorely were first married, it had seemed a constant reality, the third life that they would make. But the mundane magic happening failed them. They might be willing, but their blood was in a secret conspiracy against them. Babies, wanted and unwanted, came to others with ease, but no life would ever come from theirs, jointly, although each might prove fruitful apart. It was as though they made death between them instead of life, a common enemy that only their unity could oppose. Their childlessness was, possibly, their strongest bond.

Why did a man want children? A woman's urge was understandable, the completion of the body's cycle. But men needed children also; they had other bequests than name and property, a measure of love, put by, unspent. It shocked Jan that the only thing he loved was Box, his dog. But if you had children, you might not understand them; they would grow up and you would

look at them with amused eyes and they would turn against you. Or you might look into the eyes of your own father, re-born, and the wheel would turn for you to try again where, before, you had failed. No, sufficient unto the day.

Nathaniel switched off the dictaphone. "I'm sorry," he said, "I have to go. But Everett and Lena are coming to me tonight. Will you join us?"

Join them? Lena, Everett's wife, paralysed Lorely. Lena was a Jewess, small, blonded, oxidised would be more accurate, highly organised, unnefvingly complacent. She had brains, looks, wealth, everything but the smallest grain of humility. "Thanks very much," Jan speared an excuse, "but I think Nanny's coming. We've not seen her for months."

Nanny stood in a telephone booth at Liverpool Street Station and carefully read the dialling instructions. Although she was now too deaf to hear her respondent, she intended to make no mistakes at her end. She lifted the receiver, inserted two pennies, dialled Jan's number, and counted twenty. Then she pressed button A. Louie, who had been hanging on in eerie silence for about ten counts, heard a loud windy voice announce, "This is Miss Strange, for Mr. Jan Hegen. Miss Strange, to speak to Mr. Jan Hegen . . ." Louie, who guessed who it was, waited while Nanny again silently counted twenty. Then the voice resumed. "Is that you, Mr. Jan? This is Nanny. Very well, dear. I hope you got back safely? If it's Mrs. Lorely, good morning, how do you do? If it's Louie, I hope you are very well, and cook. I am, extremely well . . ." Louie gave a wintry smile, you couldn't get past Nanny, talk about answering back. The voice issued forth again into space, disembodied as a Morse message. "Miss Strange will be at the Oomar café in Piccadilly at one-fifteen p.m. today, if Mr. Jan can meet her there for lunch. The Oomar café. Piccadilly, one-fifteen. He is not to trouble, not to trouble at all. Miss Strange will be there in any case. If Mr. Jan is busy, Miss Strange sends her best love . . ." Nanny counted ten, "thank-you . . ." she said, comprehendingly, "good-bye. . ."

Nanny replaced the receiver and put a catarrh pastille in

her mouth in case there had been any germs. Not for nothing had she raised two generations of other people's children.

Nanny's message, transmitted by Louie, reached Jan as he was leaving Nathaniel's office. Curious, how he had thought of her at that moment. He put down the receiver and let his father in on the joke, cautiously. "That was Nanny," he said, "giving her orders. Possibly she can't manage tonight. I'm to meet her at a certain café at one-fifteen." His father smiled. "Can you be there?"

"I can't. But I shall. I cancel anything rather than let Nanny's wind-blown messages fall to seed. Her telephone messages are an act of faith. I like them to bear visible fruit in my appearance."

"You're still in the nursery, Jan, and the gong's gone. Are your hands clean?"

"They'd shame me if they weren't. Good-bye, Father."

Jan stood on the kerb waiting for a taxi and thought cheerfully of Nanny; red-checked, shapeless, unadorned Nanny, who never in her life had thought of herself; and who even now had retired no farther than a villa outside St. Albans within reach of numbers of nieces and grand-nieces and grand-nephews. One of the world's foster-mothers. But in one thing she was still aggravatingly fallible. Why did women want to lunch in tea-shops? Because he was hungry, Jan decided to take her to Scott's.

Chapter Four

IT WAS JULY BEFORE JAN FINALLY DECIDED TO SEEK OUT THE GIRL, Adele, whom he had found in the camp. He was puzzled that her parents had not replied to the letter he had written. He had a feeling that something was wrong. He thought he acted on impulse but, like all impulses, it had been growing slowly in the dark, the will that turned his car in the direction of St. John's Wood on this hot afternoon.

At first he thought he had made a mistake in the house number. He was walking slowly down the road, counting the even numbers from high to low, thinking pleasantly that she had come

home to one of these white and peaceful houses through whose long rooms he could see the green gardens beyond. Twelve, ten, eight . . . he counted ahead of him, twice, and quickened his pace. But he had made no mistake. Between numbers eight and two was only this neat rectangle of levelled earth that even in the sun of summer had an aspect of winter, of greyness and sterility. Numbers four and six had been bombed.

Questions besieged Jan's mind: where were Adele's parents when the bomb fell? Was this all there was left of home when she returned, this nothingness? Who broke the news? Where was she now? Perhaps it would have been better if she'd died, after all. Perhaps she was dead?

Adele was not dead. An hour's enquiry had brought Jan to Tracey Mews, this former stable-yard at the back of Victoria Street, not far from the great station. The yard was short and narrow. It felt enclosed, shut-in, not friendly. The late afternoon sun beat up from the unwashed cobbles and the upper windows of the five or so tenanted cottages looked tight-shut and airless, their plants wilting in the window-boxes, the bright paint of their front doors faded and blistering. The people here mind their own business, thought Jan. Yet a strong compulsion drew him. He could now scarcely hear the traffic in Victoria Street. There was no sound in the Mews. Yet he felt as though, somewhere, something were ticking loudly: a sense, not of danger, but of imminency, of revelation. I have been waiting for this, he thought, but he did not know why.

Number three was at the end of the Mews, in a corner facing the sun, beyond three lock-up garages. It seemed isolated, having no immediate or opposite neighbours. The window-boxes were empty, the windows dulled by ochre-coloured mesh curtains. The front-door had once been cream. Unexpectedly, it stood slightly open.

Without any sense of intrusion, Jan pushed the front door. It opened directly upon a short steep flight of uncarpeted stairs. At the top, on the tiny landing, was another door. This also was open. Jan did not knock. Perhaps the girl was asleep. He touched the door and it opened a few feet, silently.

At once, he saw her. She lay, in some kind of light wrapper, on a divan pushed against the wall at right angles to the window. Through the ugly thick mesh of the curtains, the sunlight lay on her face as on some mask of death. Her eyes were closed. But what Jan noticed most, was her posture. Under the narrow wrapper, her knees were drawn up towards her chin, her arms clasped tightly round them. It was, approximately, the posture of the child in the womb, the attitude of the unborn who awaits light and life. In this adult the attitude could but signify the converse: the will to return to darkness, the regression from life. He thought, her mind's gone.

"Adele." It seemed that, as before, he spoke directly to her will as it vacillated weakly between life and death, reality and unreality. The formality of her surname did not occur to him. His voice, so quiet, sounded very loud.

Had he touched a hot brand to her bare flesh, she could not have started more violently. Her hands unclasped from her knees; her whole body went rigid in the new position. Her eyes opened. In them was a look of trauma. She saw him.

Jan regretted having spoken. Uncertain how to ease her, he took a step forward. Her eyes widened, and contracted. He stood still. "Why do you leave your door open?" he asked, naturally, "unless for your friends to come in?" She did not answer. Her eyes waited. "You know me," he said, "don't you remember, the liberation? Remember me?"

She was sane, she could not decline to answer. "The Englishman," she conceded, but did not move. Jan stood over her, and thought of the camp, the bombed house. He thought of ruin, the crushing fall of established securities, the buried individuality, feebly breathing; and of tenacity, resistance, re-emergence. What could come from this girl? What had she been? There was youth in her, and an enormous age. Under the washed-out cotton kimono, her body was as fleshless as a Chinese girl's. Her face was wolfish, still yellow with privation, grey under the eyes. There was a look in her as of some fungus growth: blanched, cellar life. Only the eyes were beautiful, pale as a leaf in spring; those, and her voice. Eyes and voice that spoke, mutually, of

experience; the one, of tender, light-reflecting youth; the other, of ability, cool, incisive incipiently commanding. Weakness and strength, both were here, and something else: lethargy; was it, or apathy? Or sulks? A good slap might help, thought Jan, and was shocked at himself. He said, "You're not well. Who's looking after you? Have you any friends? Have you a doctor? Tell me," he insisted, "you can talk." Still the green eyes were locked against him. Was she responsible? He would not be obstructed, now that he was here. "If you won't tell me," he said, "I shall find out for myself." •

There was one bedroom in the flat, a small, dark, low-ceilinged room at the back, whose window came up against the rear wall of some warehouse. The room was hers; no one else, Jan reasoned, could have so few belongings. There was a crumpled handkerchief by the narrow bed, a brush and comb on the chest that was also a dressing-table. In one drawer were a few simple garments, untidily deposited, unironed. The other drawer was empty. On a hook behind a curtained recess was a summer jacket and a skirt, suspended by its hook and eye. The small wardrobe was empty. There was an entire absence of those feminine items that establish personality, no cosmetics, no shoes, no hats. The room was unrelievedly drab, the floor covered by brown matting, the bed by a slippery gold silk spread on which was embroidered, what was left of it, a brown dragon. An hotel room occupied for one night, Jan thought, would look more lived-in.

The bathroom was clean, well-used. Damp towels, a damp bath-mat. Good soap. Tooth-paste, two brushes, a deodorant. A medicine cupboard, empty.

On a table in the kitchen was a platter of bread, a used cup and plate, and the remains of a pint bottle of milk. There was little food in the larder, no tins, no stores, no left-overs. Jan could find no vegetables, or fruit. He went back to the living-room.

Adele had relaxed a little on the couch and her eyes were closed again. It seemed not to matter to her that she had a guest, a stranger, who was prowling about her home. He could turn and go, Jan considered, watching her from the doorway, and she would never give him another thought. But that was because, so

far, she had never given him any thought at all. She had seen him, spoken to him, but those were surface things. He hazarded that her mind was sealed over her awareness, her capacity to remember, to feel. But beneath that seal, memory would be at work, invading and corrupting what mind she had left.

What had it to do with him? Jan thought, he could turn, go away, leave her. That would be all. Except for the pity, the surmise, the disturbing sense that something had been given to him to do, that he had neglected. He stepped decisively into the room, drew up a small chair beside the bed, and sat down. Her eyes, with their unreachable expression, opened again. Her hair, he noticed, was very fair, almost silver, cut short, unevenly, as though she had cut it herself.

Jan sat and stared at Adele, and she stared back at him. His theory persisted that part of her attitude was obstinacy, an unwillingness to move, mentally, in case it hurt. "Sit up," he said, peremptorily, "you look most uncomfortable. I can't talk to you like that . . ." She did not move. Jan stood up. "I'll fetch a doctor," he said, after a moment, "you should be in hospital."

It worked. Reluctantly, she drew herself to a sitting position against the cushions. She answered, "I've just come out."

Jan added a couple of cushions to her back. "Who's looking after you?"

"No one."

"Can you manage everything? Can you shop?"

"I have to."

"But you're not really able?"

"I'm not interested."

"Have you enough money? I'm sorry, but it's necessary."

"I've some money."

"Enough?"

"For what?"

"To live as you want."

"I don't want to live."

"You shouldn't talk of death."

"I'm not. I don't want to die. I know life. I don't know death."

THE MAN

"You're afraid of death?"

"I'm not interested."

"Don't you want to know who I am?"

"No."

"You're not interested?"

"No."

"What will you do when I've gone?"

"Nothing."

"You've no newspapers, no books, no radio. No clock." Jan shifted her sleeve, "no watch. You live without time . . . or news. What do you think about?"

Her eyes flickered. She said nothing.

"Whose is this flat?"

"My solicitor's wife got it for me," she explained with tired indifference. "It belongs to a girl in the Forces."

"Dingy, isn't it?"

For a moment Adele's eyes roved across the room.

"You could take an interest in it."

"Why? It's not mine."

Jan stood up and went and looked out of the window. The Mews was hot and deserted. Everything felt close, static. He was baffled, irritated, yet at the same time, troubled. He turned. "I spoke to your solicitor," he said, "on the phone today. A Mr. Humphries. I got the forwarding address from the post office. 'I've been to Maida Rise.' It was the nearest reference he dared make to her tragedy. For her mother and father had been in that house when the bomb fell.

Adele's expression did not change. Nothing moves her, he thought. He continued, "Mr. Humphries says you won't see anyone. Your friends don't know you're here."

She murmured, "Friends? I had friends in Paris. But someone wasn't a friend. Someone told lies about me to the Germans."

"A collaborator?"

She stared past him. "I've no friends."

Jan went over to the couch. "You've no relatives. A few cousins, that you're out of touch with. Don't you see anyone?" She shook her head. "You leave your door open?"

"It's nice open."

"Anyone could come in."

"But I can go out."

Suddenly he understood. "You can go out when it's shut. You're not in prison now. The key's on your side. You shut the door yourself. When it's shut, you can open it again. Whether it's open or shut, you're free."

"I want it open."

"Why?"

"I can't shut it."

"Why not?"

Unnameable fears trembled in her face. What was she afraid of? And if she was afraid, why did she not shut her door, and lock it? Jan hardened his heart to find out. "Were you in prison, then, before the camp?" Her silence confirmed it. "How long?"

She seemed afraid to move. "I don't know. Years."

"But it opened, in the end, the door of the prison? The door that was closed?"

Jan achieved the opposite of the result he had hoped for. Instead of relaxing, Adele's face contracted momentarily. Then it seemed that a crack ran across it, like dry earth seamed by some inner convulsion.

"It opened." Her voice also had dried, given way.

"Who came?"

The chasm widened in her; the past broke through, disordered, violent. Jan saw it, ugly, eruptive, out of control, beyond her power to express. But there was something else, that would speak for her. She twisted, loosening the wrapper from her shoulders. It dropped, and on her thin white back Jan saw two, three marks, dark, deeply-printed, the flesh seared away under the convulsed skin. A fourth mark was visible, part-hidden by her slip. Were there others? "Four," he said.

She turned on him. "Six! Six days. But I couldn't answer their questions because I didn't know, I wasn't with the Resistance! It was all a lie! I couldn't tell them, couldn't stop them! . . ."

"It's over. They didn't get anything out of you."

"I'd have told them if I knew! Anything! I've no patriotism . . ."

"You don't know. You'd nothing to tell."

"I would have told! To stop them, but you can't stop anything! You can scream, go on your knees, there's nothing to pray to. There's nothing to save you from anything, ever!"

It was a cry from the wreckage of someone living, still able to be hurt, still afraid. Jan leant forward and drew up the fallen wrapper round her shoulders. "Then why are you here?" he asked her, "in this quiet place, in England? Able to wash, to eat and drink and sleep; to go out and come home again; no guards, no danger, no more pain? Why, now, are you safe?"

Safety, kindness. The unattainable, the long-forgotten things. Memory, damned-back, of securities, childhood faith, kind hands and voices, these things were breaking, seeping through the treacherous cracks, channelling a muddy course, that became a river, a torrent. Adele cast herself down on the couch, away from Jan, so that he should not see her, no one should see her, as she was swept away.

Jan stood looking down at Adele as she wept. Extreme though it was, this breakdown was better than her resistance: better for her. Now that she was for the time being beyond his aid, Jan looked round the room. In his eyes it had a match-stick quality, it was something that a tornado might suck up and whirl away, so weightless it seemed, so cheap and bare and unlovely. Who could get well, of any illness, in such a room? Jan turned and went out, leaving the door slightly open.

Adele did not know that Jan had gone. Her mind had gone from the room, her senses from the sights and sounds of it. She was alone in darkness, in a place that was no known land, a dark and treeless plain, where a cold wind blew. She felt the wind across her back, wrapping her dress about her body, the shapeless dress of the prison, above the heavy prison shoes. She was alone because there was no one in the world who was as she was, who could accompany her. The wind made her go forward, towards the dark tower, the small narrow iron prison door. The

door opened and she passed through it. She heard it slam. She heard screams but, because they were hers, they would not stop. . . . She was back on the plain again; it was hers, the dark wind-haunted plain. There was a cross on it, driven into the ground, a holy cross of rough dark wood weighted with the familiar succouring form, crucified. With the wind behind her, she went towards it. But she had nothing to say to it, there was nothing that the stumps of wood, the tin figure, could do for her. She turned away from them to face the wind. Now, she was in the camp, where there was company, too much of it, and light, that hurt the eyes. Home . . . someone had promised her that, but home was the bomb, the pulverising roar, the neatly-levelled earth. Home was another door that slammed, another scream that would not stop.

Adele woke up. Her face was wet, and she was shaking. But her door was open. Something caught her eye, lying on the table beside her. It was Jan's glove, the fingers curled upwards as though the living hand were still within it.

Adele reached out to the glove, and laid her hand over it.

Chapter Five

THE STREET LAMPS WERE BURNING AGAIN. Jan stood on the balcony of a fifth-floor flat in the Strand and looked across the Embankment and the river. In the summer darkness, the yellow beacons were like a distant torch procession, straggling feebly, lagging along the waterfront and over the bridges. The lights limped in the water and were shamed by a fiery silver moon. In the near curve of the shore there were battlements of light. The city was alight like an ocean liner from whose port-holes every passenger had drawn the curtains. It looked good. But so had the nights of darkness where nature alone had lighted the city. Now there would be no more revelations of witchery, of solidified shadows, airy solids, that by day disclosed themselves as the park, the square, the corner where you called a cab or proceeded, unentranced, to lunch. You would not

see again the moonlit village that had been London in war-time.

Jan turned away from the conflicting scene. Big Ben was chiming nine o'clock. Through the half-open french windows, he could see Lorely sitting on a scarlet couch beside their host, Charles Walter, the theatrical producer. Jan guessed, quite accurately, that out of the scarlet and white room, Lorely had selected the couch as being the best foil to her dress, which was white.

In Charles Walter's kind, bulldog face was an expression of concentration. His rather small, intensely blue eyes were fixed on Lorely's face. "Audiences change, Mrs. Hegen," Charles was saying, "as far as we're concerned, an audience is one person, needing something, it doesn't know what. It knows when it sees it. But we've got to know now. A year from now, our audience will be the result of things that have not yet happened. In the past few years we knew, we could be reasonably sure, that times ahead would find the audience the same, more tired, perhaps, more victorious, a little more ready to applaud itself; but not ready for change, for anything that was not lavish, easy, and expected. In war, no one wants to think. There's no continuity——" Charles stopped. Lorely, her expression carefully adjusted, was giving a series of small double nods as though she were knocking in a rather small nail. Charles went to her rescue. "Don't you agree, Mrs. Hegen, that when the war's over, people are going to want something new, in entertainment?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Walter, I agree. Something new. That's very interesting." Lorely drew a breath of relief. She'd followed perfectly. And she was looking her best. Her dress, of snow-white embossed velvet, had been rather a risk in that it was the sort of material worn by dowagers for whom it would be styled in unrevealing dowdiness. On Lorely, the dress curved low, almost too low, and clung tenaciously to every inch; only the sleeves were loose, swinging gracefully in enormous inverted bells that made her wrists and hands appear delicate as stamens. With the dress, Lorely wore the ruby pendant and ear-rings that had belonged to Jan's mother. There was a bracelet to match. Lorely shifted one of her sleeves to display the glowing stones.

On the ardent flesh they were like life itself, spilled, drops of blood: it was most interesting.

Jan joined Lorely and Charles. He never left Lorely alone with anyone for long. He drew up a chair that was like a white stuffed seashell, and sat down. "Is there anything new in entertainment?" he asked.

"Don't be lazy, Jan," Charles juttred his chin, "there's got to be something new."

"Or something nobody recognises."

"Something new, made up to the minute, up to tomorrow. Isn't tomorrow new?"

"Ask me when it's over."

"Everything's new, I believe that. Old subjects, but new people, more experience, new materials, new techniques. Audiences, too, new every time."

"Well, what are you going to give them next?"

"What are you going to give them, Jan?"

"I was going to write a play, but I've scrapped it. As you say, wars change audiences. Instead, I'm going to write my experiences as a war correspondent. Anything else must wait."

"I can wait till the spring."

"What for?"

"Your services."

"But I don't write musicals. You know that."

"I don't want a musical. I want a story, with music."

"That is a musical."

"Oh, Jan! You honour me."

"A musical comedy?"

"Not a musical comedy. A straight story——"

"With music?"

Lorely was beginning to feel her silence. "An opera, Jan! He wants you to write an opera."

"I don't believe it. Charles is a business man."

"I've lined up Tee for the lyrics, Menier for the décor, and Sari will star."

"But Sari demands a size two slipper filled with literary champagne!" Jan sounded disturbed. "I can't do it."

"I think you can." Charles took the glasses and poured another round. He knew what he wanted. The evening hadn't begun yet.

Lorely turned hopefully to Jan. "Darling," she said, factually, "why don't you do it?"

"I can't. That's the best reason."

"But you don't know till you've tried."

"Now, dear, I'll buy you a box for the first night. If I don't write it, someone else will. As far as Charles is concerned, the show already exists."

"But I want you to do it." Lorely's face was woebegone, her large, generous, untidy mouth, that had never set on any line of its own, was trembling. Jan stood up. This would never do. He went over to Lorely, stooped and kissed her on the wide, beautiful, uncomprehending brow. "I'll write something else," he promised, and went to assist Charles.

Lorely tried to compose herself, struggling between disappointment and pleasure in Jan's care. Then she forgot both these things. A man was standing in the doorway, a dark, not very tall man, with a moustache. He had an air of power, of solidity, a magnetism that did not attract, that was too strong, too dark, a little frightening. He was young, perhaps thirty, but it was impossible to think of him as young; he had always been old, as old, it spoke for itself, as the devil. In his eyes, Lorely felt herself pinioned. When he was ready, the man released her, the woman in white, with the perfect head. He spoke.

"Good evening, Charles."

Charles turned from the cocktail cabinet and came forward with outstretched hand. "Jules! Who's looking after you? Come and have a drink."

"I let myself in. How are you, Charles?" Jules Menier liked to do that, to enter a room quietly, to stand unobserved making his selection of the essentials of the scene, those details which would speak for all that was omitted. He would study people in the same way. It was remarkable how little was needed to record anybody; but you must see your subject before it saw you. Jules bent over Lorely's hand: innocence, her eyes were afraid of

life, without sin. All women should sin, if only to understand virtue. The husband, too: it was interesting, the un-given face.

Charles resettled his guests. As usual, Jules preferred to sit, in the inappropriate scarlet shell of a chair, at some distance from the company, across the room. His motive was retirement but the effect was to make him more prominent, his strong will more apparent because it seemed that he made no effort. His hands covered his mouth. His dark eyes rested on Lorely.

Lorely sought to escape. "Charles," she cast about vaguely for some topic of conversation. "What is Sari like?"

"Jules, tell Mrs. Hegen about Sari."

Jules lowered his hands from his mouth. His brilliant dark eyes were full of age and conspiracies. "Sari," he replied, "was born wearing her ear-rings. There was never a curve of which she was not aware. She has dimples in her feet, behind her knees, and under her left shoulder-blade. She is delight, made of flesh, and knows it, and is delighted."

"Is she pretty?" Lorely wanted something definite. "What colour's her hair?"

"Her hair? We shall know when we see it. And afterwards, Mrs. Hegen, you shall tell me if she's pretty."

'Afterwards' . . . what did he mean? She and Jan might leave the party first. Sari, if she came, might still be present, there might not be an opportunity. When would there be an 'afterwards'? Bemused, Lorely lifted her eyes to Jules, and found them held. It was as though they had been waiting to trap her, his mesmerising, amused, inescapable eyes. In their grip, she felt tender and exposed. What would he do with her? What was 'afterwards'?

It had been after one when Jan and Lorely got home. Jan moved vaguely about his dressing-room. Lorely was already in bed. For Jan, it had been a stimulating evening. He knew now that he was going to work on Charles's musical. There was now an inevitability about the project that, as a writer, told him that he could do it. His mind felt very clear, fully-charged, as though he had just had a long night's sleep. But the same mind was far

from his undressing. His trousers and jacket draped a chair, awry; stud, collar, tie, shirt-front, they were anywhere. His shirt fell on the floor. He walked about in his socks and felt an immense dignity, a command of many subjects.

He was covered when he came back into the bedroom, in the silk pyjamas that Lorely had chosen, the dark silk dressing-gown. But still he didn't feel like bed. He looked about the softly-lit, delicate, shimmering room. It shut him in, more so than was usual. "Aren't you tired of being in the basement," he remarked, "I'd give a lot to be able to open a window like Charles's."

Lorely lay back against her *crêpe de Chine* pillows. Her hands were folded on her breast. Her hair, in a single plait, lay forward over one shoulder and was knotted with satin. Her eyes were closed. Something had been enlivening her, a man, with dark eyes; but now he was no longer here, she couldn't remember him. It was as though a shower of golden rain had gone up, brightening her momentarily; and then had fallen away, leaving her in this soft darkness, at peace. Why must Jan talk when she wanted to sleep, after the display?

"You know we can't open the window, not to see out," she answered, sleepily, "you'd need a ladder, to see the yard."

"We'll move, shall we? Somewhere high up?"

"Not now," Lorely turned over, "come to bed."

"It's so hot," Jan went to the window and parted the satin draperies. Then he turned. "It's hardly open," he said, restively.

Lorely opened her eyes widely. She sat up. "I haven't said my prayers." Her hand groped in her bag at the bedside and brought out the black-and-silver rosary. Her fingers moved over the beads. She began, "*Hail Mary, Mother of God.*"

Jan drew on the hidden cord and the narrow shaft of window descended noiselessly. A soft air blew down upon him and beyond the bars he could see the white radiance of the moon like a shower in the sky. He felt land-bound, chained, heavy. What did he want, tonight? Whatever it might be, it was not in this silken room where Lorely sat up in bed, her eyes tightly shut, her lips murmuring, telling her beads. She looked grave and

good. The rosary was her rope to heaven, each bead a knot lest she slip. Sometimes the rope broke: not one's own, but someone else's, that no one could mend. It left a warped being, who had once been young, safely anchored, now sleeping cheerlessly in a room that the moon never found, behind a door that was slightly open.

Chapter Six

WHEN ADELE AWOKE, it was with the sensation that she was not alone. It was not an awareness of any physical company but rather as though she had been for some hours with someone who had comforted her and whose presence still lingered in her mind and heart. For some moments she lay totally relaxed, resting in a peace that she had no wish to question. But the questions would come. This had to do with the man who came yesterday; his thoughts, it seemed, had been with her ever since. But why should that be? It was her folly, that she had allowed herself to think of him because, somehow, he shut off her thoughts of the past. To have something to think of in the present . . . someone who had never known her as she was, who could not look at her and think, you were young and pretty, with a bright colour that came quickly when you slept, or laughed, or loved, you had a soft body, and a hard mind that could think, construct, execute; you were whole, part of life, and now you are apart, not like the rest, but strange, uncomfortable, like the diseased or disfigured; no one here is as you are, no one has your memories.

This man did not look at her like that: he was not curious or embarrassed. Could you surprise him? It seemed unlikely. He must have knowledge, of the evil and ugliness, the obscene and malign passions that most people never found in themselves: that she, Adele, had known, been made a part of, and could never forget. How then could he have forgotten if he, too, had suffered as she had? It could not be. He would look at her differently if she told him what she knew, what she had discovered in life. But she would not tell him . . . then he could

not change, as he looked at her: change was so frightening, it was the movement of the unseen, you never knew what people could do to you, those whom you didn't even know, whom you had never harmed. No, she wouldn't let him see her as she was. Then she could think of him unaltered, the homely face, the large, clear, calm eyes. Why should he come again, anyway? Except that he had left a glove? But he must have many gloves.

Adele opened her eyes. Her peace was gone . . . she had been afraid to accept it, and now she was empty again . . . why did one wake, day after day, to emptiness? The sunlight lay on the thin tawdry gold silk spread that she had not bothered to turn back. She straightened her knees and it slithered half off the bed. It seemed that she had never seen it before. How ugly it was! But she did not care.

When she first heard the knocking, she thought she must be mistaken. No one came at nine-thirty. No one came at all. Except . . . She got quickly out of bed and slipped on her wrapper. The knocking was repeated, firm, not very loud. Adele stood by the bed and did not move. She listened. There was no further sound. The doors, she knew, were open. If it were the man, would he not come up as he had done before, or call out? Anyone else could go away. Would he go away, if it were him? Did she want him to go? He must know that she heard, if he were there, if he were still there.

Adele went to the door and listened again. She could hear a clock ticking, a car hooter, a long way away. Should she go down? Whoever it was, must have gone by now. There would be the empty doorway, and no more suspense. She could go back to bed. On her bare feet, she tip-toed down the stairs.

He seemed to fill all the doorway, he was so large, so real, blocking out the hot sunlight that lay out in the yard behind him. His two hands supported a hamper; on top of it was a smaller basket and a flat brown-paper parcel. Although she had not intended to, Adele opened the door a little more widely and he came in and set down his burdens at the foot of the stairs. "I was going to leave them there," he said as he straightened, "but I hoped you'd come down."

Now that he was here she felt a total weakness, as though he possessed all her strength and, if he went, he would take it with him. She had not known how weak she was until she met someone who was strong. She could not speak. She looked at the hamper because she feared to look at him.

"I brought you something," he said, "shall I tell you, or would you rather open them and see?"

Why was he here? Was it a trick? People did dreadful things, they took advantage of you, if you weren't wary: you had to be without trust, without pity. She looked again at the hamper. "You won't get anything out of me," she said, and could not stop herself.

Jan found himself staring at Adele. He thought of a starved alley-cat he had once seen, the skin sticking to its ribs. He had marvelled then at the tenacity of life, at the strong purpose that drove that speck of consciousness, the spirit that had not flickered or died. Adele was like that cat: she had even the same grey-white look. She would fight bitterly for the life for which she had no use, or against alien hands. To help that cat, you had to leave it something and go away. When you had gone far enough, it would come out and eat. Only people weren't cats: there was more to them than hunger.

"What would I get from you?" he asked. "There are plenty of women. I'm not a killer. I'm not poor. What else is there?"

She thought, 'My strength, I am stronger when no one comes.' She asked, "Why do you come?"

"Because I want to."

She knew it was true. Nothing within her questioned or opposed it. He came because she needed him. How could she deny it? She turned and went up the stairs, leaving him to follow her.

Jan set his gifts on the kitchen table. "Have you had breakfast?" he asked. Adele shook her head. She was barefoot, Jan noticed, and an undistinguished nightgown showed beneath the cotton wrapper. Any woman would be at a disadvantage so dressed.

Adele felt Jan's look pass over her, kindly, but matter-of-fact.

A memory pierced her of a negligée she'd worn in Paris. On her neck she could feel the downy-soft pale green swansdown. Why was she like this now? But the memory went quickly. That was not herself, it was someone else. . . .

"Get dressed," said Jan, "perhaps I can make some coffee?"

"I haven't any."

"Don't you like coffee?"

Not like coffee? The tall enamel pot with the long spout, the steaming hunger-making fragrance of it in the shallow bowls? "It reminds me," she said.

"Of France?"

"Of Paris."

"Mine won't. It's drinkable but, I warn you, I tend to break the cups. But get some things on," Jan repeated, "and I'll make some tea. Where's the pot?"

She set out the plain cream crockery on the cheap gilt tray, showed him the tea-caddy, the tea-pot perched like a pregnant hen in a woolly chest protector on the rack above the cooker. What odd possessions people had! Yet Adele seemed to see nothing around her, at least, not with a seeing eye. Jan got the impression that she was living years back, that she had not yet caught up with herself. She was like a sleep-walker in a persisting nightmare.

When Adele had gone, Jan put the kettle on and set about looking for bread, milk and other things. Unconsciously, he was interested as he had never been before in every detail of this establishment, every clue it afforded to its occupant. It was unfortunate that someone else owned the place, the woman Adele had said was in the Forces. Jan could form a picture of her, but it was one which made him close his eyes.

Adele opened the drawer of her chest to look for a clean blouse. She had three and one of them was here. It was un-ironed. She stood in her cheap slip with the rumpled thing in her hand and wondered if she had time to iron it? He was so well-dressed. It was not that she had noticed his clothes, but that he had a kind of natural quality. What would he think of her un-ironed blouse?

What did it matter? She was of another world from his. She could not hide the fact, by ironing her blouse. She put it on, with the black woollen skirt, the rayon stockings, the black utilitarian shoes. She went into the bathroom, sponged her face, combed her hair. Her mind was blind again to her appearance, to what anyone from the outside world might think of her.

Jan noticed the blouse at once. Had she slept in it? Then he realised she was not interested, in herself, as in anything else. He did not look at her again, but stooped and slipped back the latch of the hamper. "Open it," he said, and wondered if she would show, or feel, any pleasure?

Adele turned back the lid. She saw food: tins, bottles, jars, enticingly-shaped, bearing the armorial label of a Piccadilly store, and grouped around other bulging, snowily-wrapped shapes with, at the sides, a glimpse of wine. In the basket, was fruit: commoner fruit, in the main, but royally packed, apple, pear, orange, in cossetted state beside the regal grape.

From the food hamper, Adele lifted out the larger of the white-wrapped packages. She could not bear not to know what was inside it. The package contained a whole cooked chicken, firm and full of flesh, deeply browned. The other package contained a dressed lobster. Hunger moved in her. She would have eaten a piece of toast for breakfast, without relish. But she could eat the whole of the chicken and the lobster, both of them, this minute. She was not interested in the jars. If Jan had not been there she would have picked up the chicken in her fingers and bitten a piece out of the side. She glanced up at Jan and her hands fell to her sides. He would know she was hungry, he would want to know why.

Jan was puzzled. It was the first interest she had shown in anything. What was wrong? "Can't you manage them?" he asked, "there's nothing here to give you a pain, unless it's the lobster, though this may be more the thing," he picked out a jar of beef tea, "it's concentrated nourishment." He unscrewed the top, and smelled it. "Don't eat it all at once."

Adele looked mutely at Jan: would he take the other things away? "I can eat," she allowed.

"All these are all right," he said, delving again, "in fact, they might pep up your appetite." The tins and jars, of real turtle soup, calves' foot jelly and honey, stood all around. But the lobster, the brown fat chicken, he was wrapping up and putting back in the hamper. "What are you doing with those?" She could ask, couldn't she?

She had not kept the apprehension out of her voice. Jan heard it. He did not look round, but he moved over to the cupboard and fetched a large plate, and a knife and fork. He unwrapped the chicken again and carved a wing. "Try a bit of this," he suggested, and added several thick slices of breast, "you can always leave it." He spooned out some of the calves' foot jelly and set down the plate beside the clumsy slices of bread-and-butter that he had cut.

Adele pulled up a chair to the corner of the kitchen table and sat down and began to eat. Once she started, she could not stop: she was conscious only of the cool, delicate flesh, the good bread spread thickly, she noticed, with real butter. She washed it down with hot stewed tea. Jan drew a cork with a pop and poured some burgundy into a cup because he could not find a glass. He'd once taken a child out for the day: anyone could mix anything, if they felt like it. "Drink this," he said. Adele did so and looked at the fruit. Jan stayed her hand and took a flat box from the bottom of the hamper; in it was a cake, a sponge mixture, plain but nutritious, filmed with fine sugar. Adele ate a slice of the cake and then a pear and some grapes. Her stomach felt heavy and there was a warmth in her cheeks. She looked guiltily at Jan. "I've plenty of food," she excused herself.

"Then why don't you eat it?"

"I eat when I'm hungry."

"What do you eat?"

"What there is."

"Why is there so little?"

"I can't be bothered."

Would she look better after herself, Jan wondered, if she became more hungry? And could she afford to? How could he find out without offending her?

"Come out," he suggested, "and let's get some salad to go with the lobster."

"No."

"I've got the car. I'll run you round to the market . . ."

"No."

Why this flat refusal? The colour had left her cheeks. He said carefully, "Wouldn't it be easier to say you can't run to it, if that's the case? It's not your fault, if that's so?"

She blurted out, "I've enough. I've five pounds a week."

The sum was less than half what Jan would spend in a day, around town; but he realised that it would suffice her needs if she were careful.

"Then we'll go and see what we can find, shall we? It's a very nice day."

"No!" Adele backed her chair from the table. "Everything's ordered. The stores send. I don't need to go out."

"When do the things come?"

She hesitated. If she lied, he would find out. "Saturday," she said.

It was Tuesday. "Salads don't keep a week," he smiled, "at least, the lobster won't. Shall we go now?"

"I never go out." She was cornered, she had to say it. "Sometimes, I have to. Not often. Never, when I needn't."

"If people see you've been very ill, do you mind?"

"I don't wish to be seen."

"You're not in Germany. People are not unkind. Nobody's going to stare at you."

"They can't help it."

"They can see you want food."

The wine and meat had strengthened her. She knew very clearly why she would not go out. She stood up. "I never go out! People turn and look after me. They can see that there's something about me. It's in my eyes. They may be kind, but they're curious. They stare."

"Don't you ever want to stare? Try staring back, and see who lasts the longer." Jan went to Adele and touched her shoulder. "Come and talk to me."

They went into the sitting-room and sat on the divan. Jan gave Adele no more opportunity to go on thinking about herself. "Something made me stare, once," he said, conversationally. "It was about five years ago. I was driving in the suburbs, and I stopped at some traffic-lights. A man came by me, under the lamps: a sort of city clerk, about fifty-five. He was carrying a largish brown-paper parcel. He turned a few yards down a side-street and, looking all about him, quickly laid the parcel in the gutter. Then he came back, trying to look as if nothing had happened. I wonder what was in the parcel?"

Jan stopped speaking. Adele was looking across the room and, from her expression, Jan could not read whether she were listening or not. "What's your guess?" he prompted her.

She turned her head. "I'm not going out," she said. Thus she warned him, she was not to be talked into any change in her habits, in the only ways by which she had found she could live at all.

Jan could hit her, in her inertia, her apathy. But he could be stubborn, too.

"So you've already told me," he remarked. "Then, I suppose you've not been out after dark? The black-out's off, you know? The side-streets look Victorian, the little light seems more mysterious than none at all."

"They're not gas?"

"Oh, just fewer, that's all. And weaker. Something else to complain about, to the new Government."

"What Government?"

"Labour. The Conservatives lost the election, swept right out. The Labour Party have a two-to-one majority. There's nothing they can't do now, if they can."

"But Churchill?"

"Churchill leads the Opposition."

"Why did they do that?" Her fierce indignation was the first live expression Jan had seen in her. "He didn't deserve it. Abroad, Churchill *was* England. What will they say?"

Jan shrugged. "Still, the country wanted a change. And very few people know what they're voting for."

"You had to be out of England to know what Churchill meant. Other countries were poor, pitiable . . . they'd no leaders . . . no Churchill. My friend in the camp was a lady from Avignon. She told me about Churchill."

"Where's she now?"

"She died. That's why I'm alive, I think. You see, I had her food parcels, her clothes, her place in the hut. It was better for all of us, because she made one less. I missed her."

Adele spoke with a sense of irony. Jan thought, she has a full mind, that once commented on all it saw, and would do so again, if she allowed it. Whenever her awakened interest made a breach, her thoughts overflowed. She was unaware that he had been trying to make her think. She continued to let flow this memory that had surfaced, explaining to him precisely so that he should understand, in her cool soft voice, her thin square hands resting in her lap, her green eyes fixed on the room in an indrawn expression, lighted by a sharp intelligence.

"I wore her shirt for a long time, till someone stole it. I was angry, because it was hers. It was warm, too. I kept my eyes open in the camp, but I never saw it. I expect they sold, or exchanged it outside the hut. If I'd seen anyone wearing it, I would have torn it off them because it was hers, and mine. Then I thought, how would I prove it? Because we'd none of us anything belonging to us that hadn't belonged to someone else: even the patches, the thread that sewed them, was stolen, handed down from the dead. We lived on each other, it was in our rags, life on life, patch on patch. You forgot how it all began, what you were like, yourself, in the beginning."

Jan lit a cigarette. He did not wish to encourage too full a spate of memories, as happened yesterday. He turned the cigarette case over in his hands. "Do you smoke?" he asked.

"I did." She stared at the opened gold case for some moments. Then she took one, lighting it with a naïve air of novelty. "I had a long holder," she remarked. "I hated it, the cigarette was so far away, you didn't seem to have anything to do with it."

"Why did you use it?"

The green eyes softened. For a moment, they looked pretty

and sunny and Jan thought she was going to smile; then they hardened. "I was young," she said, as though it explained everything.

"You're young now."

"Am I?" Her eyes accused him of the thought; they argued with all the reproach of young things who, because they have been forced to learn too much too quickly, think there can be nothing more to know. As if anyone could tell her!

"Wait and see," he said, and felt a faint excitement that he could not explain, "you'll feel young again, one day. . . ."

Adele looked at Jan, seeing him clearly for the first time. His face, she thought, was all stuck together as though someone had modelled it, hastily, in lumps, and left it unfinished. Yet there were finalities in his expression, qualities in him, she felt, that would not change. His silvery eyes were peaceful, and his mouth: those were features he had completed himself. She asked him, "What's your name?"

He told her. "But please call me Jan. Because I can't call you Miss Forrest, now. It's too late."

Her eyes wavered. "We had numbers," she remembered.

"We could have colours. But we'd still be ourselves."

The word 'colour' seemed to recapture her attention. "We have colours, perhaps? Not the colouring of eyes, hair, or even what we choose to wear? But the colours of ourselves, more than one colour, for what we are? But what's the use, if you can't see them! You'd have to know a person for years, even to guess, and then you could be wrong. I don't work in colour."

"Work? Then you paint?"

"I don't work," she contracted again.

Jan thought, how much she's lost, of what she was, what was once her life; yet it must still be there, her ability, her former personality. He would take them for granted and then perhaps, in time, she would agree?

"I can't draw anything," he admitted cheerfully, "I use shorthand, because I can barely write."

"I can't do shorthand. I once thought it would make a frieze round a pottery jug."

"You do the jug, I'll do the frieze. We could then throw it into the river with a message for posterity. . . ."

"What will you say?"

"Make the jug, that'll give me time to think."

"I couldn't," she linked her fingers tightly, "not now."

Jan did not press Adele further. But he saw in the linked fingers the joining of a small battle, one that would grow more intense: the war of past and present, fought over the years between. What had she been? How had she looked when she was young, twenty, was it, or twenty-one, in Paris? When had she thought of people as colours? What had been her work, and was it broken in her, the creative will? Studying her down-bent face, Jan was not helped at all. It was like trying to reconstruct a personality from a photograph, an image imprinted perpetually in one expression. On looking at Adele, you realised what an active thing was a face, forever moving, eyes, mouth, muscles, mysteriously. Adele's face moved only with the more violent evulsions of her thought or feeling; for the rest, it was immobile as winter water, glassed with ice. Her lips, pressed tightly together, were pale as a child's, touchingly undefined. Lowered, the tell-tale green eyes showed only a line of fairish lashes under fair delicate brows. Her pale hair stuck out in graceless points from the nape of her thin neck at the base of which the top vertebra projected sharply through the thin shirt. 'Little scarecrow,' he thought, keenly, 'what will become of you?'

"Will you do something?" he asked. She lifted her eyes. They were softer, Jan noticed; he did not believe she had any real resistance to him. "I'll show you," he qualified, and went out of the room.

Adele watched Jan as he left her side. Without him, although it was a warm morning, she felt colder, as though he had been standing between herself and all the days before he had come and now she was exposed again. In a way, he was her future, where before she had no future. Before? That was only yesterday: how different was today from the day before yesterday!

When Jan came back, Adele saw that he was carrying a thin flat box with some kind of picture on the lid. He laid it on the

divan beside her and she saw that it was a jig-saw puzzle of Windsor Castle, a tourist's view of the ascent to St. George's Chapel, grey-walled, under a sunny flag. Jan lifted the lid and Adele saw that the jumbled pieces were finely cut from thin wood, not the rounded cardboard segments of her childhood puzzles. It was a large puzzle and there were many pieces. Jan said peacefully, "Will you do some of it, before I come again?"

"When will that be?"

"Not very long; you can start with the flag." Jan swept a clear space in the box and picked out two sections of the Union Jack. They did not fit. After poking and poking in the box he found eight of the red, white and blue sections; from them he assembled the fly of the flag, but not easily. "There!" he looked up from it triumphantly, "you can go on from there." Then Jan saw that, for the first time, Adele was smiling at him. It was not a complete smile, just a lifting of the corners of her mouth, a pointing of the light eyes, and an indenting of the drawn cheeks as though she might once have had dimples. But it was a smile. "You've been twelve minutes," she said.

"How do you know?"

"I always know the time. It's years since I had a clock."

Jan evaded this topic. "It's years since I did a jig-saw. Are you going to finish it for me?"

Adele did not know whether she would do it, whether it might not take too long to find a piece that fitted; you would put it all down and forget. She turned over the pieces with their sharp serrated edges. They were nearly all grey, that would make it more difficult. "You've done the easy bit," she said.

For answer, Jan picked up the box and shook it sharply. The section he had assembled fell apart, the bright fragments buried under segments of grey. He set down the box. "Have the flag flying when I come," he looked at his watch, "promise?"

What was a promise? Adele thought, something that you said you would do and then did, if you could. Supposing you couldn't? What would Jan think of her then? She shook her head at him. "I might not keep my promise."

"Promise to try?"

Could she? When he was gone, she would feel different, she knew. It was safe to talk a little with Jan, to take some interest in the matters he chose to mention, because when he had gone, those subjects would be closed. But if she allowed herself to become interested when she was alone, there would be no end to it, to all that she could and might think about, or to all the duties that were undone, that would have to be considered. Her interests were stored away, like lumber; she could never turn them out, restore them, make use of them. It was too big a job, to begin on herself: and the jig-saw might prove the beginning.

He was disappointed in her, she could see it: his face wore a heavy look in place of the pleasure and encouragement. He'd looked the same a little while back, when he was telling her something and she had not listened. But she had listened. She saw that he was going. She must please him again, quickly now! She asked him, "What did you think was in the brown-paper parcel?"

Jan smiled. "My guess, was a pair of ladies' corsets."

When Jan had gone, Adele smoothed over the crumpled pieces of the puzzle. But something was catching at her mind, an activity more urgent than the jig-saw. Because she could not determine what it was, she got up and went into the kitchen. There she stood, blankly, surrounded by the part-eaten chicken, the tins, the jars, the delectable fruit, the wedge-shaped bottles of egg cocktail. But it was nothing to do with these. On the table Jan had left the morning paper. Her hand went out towards it and withdrew. There was still something else. She went into the bedroom, tracking down the uncertain trail of her thought. The drawer in the chest was still partly open, and that reminded her. Hurriedly she pulled off her blouse and slipped into her wrapper. From the drawer she pulled out a handful of garments. With these, and the blouse, she went back into the kitchen and, from an upper shelf, took down the electric iron.

Chapter Seven

MRS. CAREW LOOKED UP WITH SURPRISE as Lorely came into her kitchen. It was half-past twelve and Mrs. Carew expected Jan only to be in for lunch. This was Lorely's first day at work and Mrs. Carew, who had been busy, seemed only just to have served her as she sat in the dining-room, immaculate and sorrowful, eating a hearty breakfast at the unprecedented hour of half-past eight. And here she was again. . . .

"Mrs. Carew," Lorely's voice was tragic, "will you ask Louie to bring me lunch in bed? And ask her to come and help me."

"Aren't you well, then, Mrs. Hegen?" Lorely appeared radiantly well in a pale pink linen dress with a matching hat. There was even a glow in her cheeks, unless it was from the hat. But as Mrs. Carew had never seen Lorely ill, she could not draw comparisons.

"I'm dead, really dead," Lorely drew off a delicate sand-coloured glove and examined her pink-tipped hands, "and dirty, the dust there! I must be grey right through. And I made a great mistake, I washed with some soap I found, if it was soap, and the water was cold. My hands might have been dipped in acid. What stuff to leave, in a wash-basin! But really, they should give you protective clothing, capes with hoods, and gloves. Now I know why Mrs. Thackeray wears navy, and her hair's like rope. Louie!" Lorely almost fell on her servant's neck, "Come and run my bath and help me to bed. I've been unpacking parcels all the morning. It's been terrible."

Mrs. Carew listened as Lorely's vibrant tones receded along the corridor. The idea of expecting Mrs. Jan to do a job of work! In this world, there were those who worked, and those who couldn't. It was right, else there would be no work for those who could. It didn't do to encourage the rich in practical ways. If you used your head, you got out of a life where everything was used, nothing wasted, into one where everything was discarded but the very best. The rich had too much of everything, something had to go, imperfect food, husbands, yesterday's

flowers. When the rich started to put up with what they didn't want, there'd be a whole army out of work, including Mrs. Carew. A large lump of butter went into the pan. You, too, could have the best, if someone else paid.

When Jan came back from his walk, Box, his fat Labrador bitch, went skeltering down the stairs and along the passage into the bedroom, instead of into the kitchen. A little puzzled, Jan followed her.

Lorely, in a lace-encrusted nightdress, was just getting into bed. Box, her bottom quivering, was sitting looking longingly but hopelessly at the satin quilt. Lorely, with an air of collapse, drew up the silken covers and lay prostrate. Jan bent over her. "Are you ill?"

"I don't know yet." Lorely cast a despairing look at Louie, who was discreetly hanging away the pink linen dress. "Don't put it away, Louie. Have it cleaned. No, I don't want it . . . you have it. I know I'll never wear it again."

"Thank you, madam." Louie retired with an expression of correct lack of interest, the pink dress lying casually on her arm: it was a model and scarcely worn, she would get six guineas for it at the agency.

"Have you had an accident?" Jan was sure she hadn't. "What about your job? Do they know you're here?"

Lorely's eyes opened in affront. "Why should they?"

"Where do they think you are?"

"I'm having my lunch."

"In bed? What time are you due back?"

"I'm not going back! I'll never go near the place again, not down the same street. That dreadful room, so dirty, the floor was never swept, no furniture, just long tables, nothing to sit on, and great dirty windows. Like a railway station. Of course I'm not going back."

"I don't know why you ever went," Jan was not surprised, "you knew it wasn't in your line."

"Mrs. Thackeray never gave me a chance. She said it was fun."

"Perhaps it was." Jan sat down on the bed and drew Box to

his side. Box was lazy, too. If you wanted her to run, she lay down, and that was that. At least she was honest.

"If you think it funny to see me picking up great heavy parcels from a dusty floor. And the nasty things in them, not even clean, let alone funny."

"No nice people?"

"Terrible people in overalls, all laughing, I don't know what at."

Jan thought of the laughter of friends and strangers, of comrades in peace and war and trouble. How tragic, to have no laughter.

"They won't be laughing," he said, "when they think you've had an accident."

"They won't notice I've gone."

"Someone's bound to. Who's in charge?"

"Mrs. Thackeray."

Jan stood up. "We'd better ring her. What shall I say?"

Lorely slipped farther down the bed. "Say I'm not strong enough."

Jan turned his head. The fallacy of it occurred to him so forcibly that it showed in his face. "But you are," he objected. At once he saw his mistake, in Lorely's round aggrieved eyes. "How can you know?" she demanded, "why, I can hardly stand, after only this morning. I'm not strong at all!"

"You've no idea what you could do if you tried," Jan lingered by the telephone, "no one has. You'd work at the Red Cross day and night, if it was your living."

"You want to kill me," Lorely sat up in bed sounding anything but weak, "I'll tell her myself."

Jan stayed her hand as it reached for the telephone. "You misunderstand me. I don't want you to work, of course. I'm merely stating that you can, and Mrs. Thackeray will know it. Can't we think of something better?"

"I can't work," Lorely stuck to it doggedly. "I can't be in those dirty places. They kill me. Some people don't mind them. I do."

"I wonder what you'd do if you really had to put up with

something? If you'd to live for years like a gypsy, with people who'd make Mrs. Thackeray look like a sterilised angel."

"I know she wouldn't! Why do you keep harking about dreary things that can't happen? You'd think we were going to be flung into a field to starve, tomorrow. As if I could tell you what I'd do! Starve, I suppose. Or kill myself."

"That might be difficult." Lorely thought that Jan was looking at her oddly. What was he thinking? Why did he look at her, mysteriously, as though she were someone whom he did not know? What did he want to know? If he asked her questions she would answer them, if she could. But he never asked, never explained those moments when he looked at her with surmise, yet was silent. Rarely for her, she asked him, "What are you thinking?" But she saw by his slight hesitation that his answer would not be complete, that he would hold something back.

"That it could happen. We could lose everything. Others have. . . ."

"How?"

"Circumstances. Another war. You and I could find ourselves living a Wellsian life in the craters of the world we know. Conquered, not free."

"Oh, the atomic bomb." Lorely sat back. "I didn't read it. I'm tired of bombs."

Jan knew Lorely too well to be angry. It was no good, she would never give her mind to anything that was destructive unless it were on her own doorstep.

"Life collapsed for a lot of people, without the atomic bomb. But what we'd each of us do if it happened to us, is interesting." Jan was thinking aloud now but Lorely still couldn't follow. "Civilised life doesn't strip us. We've elemental tendencies that we've never had a chance to discover, and wouldn't believe if we did discover them. We're capable of heresies, violence; you might rob, murder, or be a woman of the noblest self-sacrifice; I might be anything. But what we are we don't know ourselves. Yet we go on trying to know each other. It's hopeless, isn't it?"

"You used not to be hopeless." Lorely caught at the only

word she could reiterate. "Men always get gloomy when they talk war. Yet wars end and everything's the same."

"Is it?"

"Well, I am."

"You're the same because you're untried. You've had no war."

Lorely stared at Jan with round eyes. Within her, inexplicable and unfair, was the conviction that Jan was right. Sometimes when people talked of war, a look would come into their faces as though they looked at something that she, Lorely, was expected to see, but couldn't. She would feel as though she had strayed into a church of some other denomination, where the form of service was unfamiliar and everyone was dutifully praying, a line ahead of her. War, it was true, had meant nothing to her but inconvenience and not seeing so much of Jan. Well, that wasn't her fault. She could think of a hundred small frustrations and fears that Jan knew nothing about. They wore you down like a sore thumb. "Oh, I know you think nobody's done anything but yourself," she said resentfully, "I haven't lost a leg, if that's what you mean. But then neither have you. And men don't have to put up with the shortages that women do."

"They don't require so many useless things."

"If they did, they'd make sure they got them, war or no war, they wouldn't go without."

"What do you go without?"

"Lots of things. It's misery. And you'd like me to have less."

"What have I ever wanted you not to have?"

"Oh, I know you'd like to see me go short, and stalk about in trousers, driving an ambulance, with no make-up. If you hadn't gone off with another woman who had the sense to know that men expect women to look beautiful no matter what it costs."

"Costs the men or the women?"

"Women, always. A woman's life's hard. Those who go round winning medals, only do it to get talked about. They please themselves. But people like me who take care of themselves, do it," Lorely faltered, "for someone else."

The oblique reference to her love for him, embarrassed Jan. Because of it, he wilfully concentrated on that part of her argument with which he could disagree. "Is your life hard?" he asked, "with all the luxuries you have, clothes, vanities, a home and security? You've never been uncomfortable even; nothing's hurt you, frightened you, disillusioned you; you've still your faith . . ." Jan checked himself. It was, he knew, the thought of Adele that was driving him to apply to his wife the extreme standards of suffering that life had imposed upon Adele. Was it fair? What, after all, had happened to himself, that could compare with Adele's experiences? Except that he had witnessed much that was desperate and destructive and could not keep himself from participating, imaginatively, in those ordeals? Because of Adele it seemed, he was enlarging, sharing through her an experience that set him apart from those he had known before—and from Lorely.

Lorely was overwhelmed, not by what Jan was saying, because to her that did not make sense, but by the anger with which he spoke. Why was he angry with her? What had she done? Like a child that has been smacked too hard for nothing, her eyes filled with tears. Jan saw them. He came hastily to the bed and drew the covers closer to Lorely, adjusting them with small conscience-stricken pats. "There now!" he said heartily, "what shall I say to Mrs. Thackeray? Shall I tell her you're tired, not well? Perhaps you need a holiday?"

The moment it was spoken, Jan regretted the suggestion. Lorely brightened at once. "That's an idea! Where shall we go?"

"Not me. You. I'm too busy . . ."

Her face fell. "Oh, I'm not going without you. Why are you too busy? You're not doing anything. . . ."

"I've just started the notes for my book. I couldn't get away at this moment."

"We'll wait till you're finished. How long will that be?"

"Next spring at the earliest."

She urged him, "Then you must have a break before you start!"

"I can't. I'll lose my grip if I leave it."

"How absurd! Let's go to Scotland for a month. You can take your book with you."

"There isn't any book to take. And there won't be one if I leave London now. I've people to see, references to check."

"You're going to have a rest first! You never rest unless you're made. Scotland! You'll get some shooting soon."

"I'm not going to Scotland!" Jan felt desperate. It would be like Lorely to ride straight over him and make all the arrangements before he knew. She could be as self-willed as a baby tank at times.

To go away now would mean not seeing Adele, possibly for several weeks. She was progressing; each day made a difference. But it was a fight. She tired so easily of the struggle, of any effort to take heart and interest in a life in which she could still see no worth-while future. She still took no interest in her occupations for their own sake, but only in those tasks whose completion, she knew, would please him. Because of Jan, Adele ate, she read the papers, listened to the news on the radio Jan had bought her; music upset her. She would cook, if it was something for himself; and the jig-saw was nearing completion. If she would take up her modelling again, would initiate of her own accord something that she felt she must finish, he would feel that he could leave her, at least for a time. Perhaps if he sent her some clay, some tools, whatever they were?

"If you won't take a holiday, I can't have one either," Lorely interrupted his thoughts, "you know I hate being on my own."

"Go down to Cluer," Jan suddenly thought of it; "you've friends there. And I'll join you at week-ends." He wouldn't, if he could help it. Or not often. Not till Adele was safe to leave.

"There's nothing to do at Cluer," Lorely objected, half-heartedly.

"What more could you wish?" It was true. Lorely could do absolutely nothing for incredible periods of time, with only the pleasantest of effects. Well, Cluer in summer was the place for that.

Jan thought of Cluer farm, the pleasant Elizabethan farmhouse

that once had overflowed with life, with himself and Everett and their school-friends, their wives, the week-end parties between the wars, then Everett's two boys, now grown young men. But now Cluer was quiet. Only Aunt Dorée, his father's maiden aunt, still lived there, presiding remotely over the mellow shell of the household she had ordered incisively for so many years. Nothing had changed, except that quiet had crept through all the rooms and the last line of the tennis courts had faded from the lawn. Lorely liked Cluer when she got there. If he could get her there.

"What did you want to do, then? Go out dancing? Get some golf, or some tennis? Ride? Play bridge?" Lorely's interest in all these, Jan knew, was only lukewarm. Collectively they would be annihilating. "A hotel would be more interesting," he agreed, "it's true there's nothing to do at Cluer except laze in the punt or sleep in the sun in the garden."

Lorely gave a little sigh. She'd slept in beds, chairs, couches, in cars, cinemas and, recently, in the theatre. But it was a long time since she'd slept in a garden. Or in a punt. Her hand trailed vaguely over the side of the bed and her eyes sought the hidden window through which the sun never came. "I might go down for a day or two," she said.

Lorely's hair was still spread in a heavy curtain round her shoulders where she had unpinned and not troubled to re-plait it. She pulled it now across one shoulder and began, idly, to re-plait it, her thoughts still lazing in far places.

"Why are you doing that?" There was a small smile in Jan's eyes as he sat again on the bed and drew Lorely's hands away from their task. It was a well-worn groove in their married life, this habitual joke about Lorely's hair. Plaited, it was a symbol of decorum, the prelude to a formal toilette, or to honest sleep. Unplaited, well, that was a matter for themselves alone.

"I'm going to bed." Lorely, her hands' prisoned in Jan's, answered him in mock protest, her face warming as a woman's will when she is about to be loved.

"You can leave your hair."

"At one o'clock? What about Louie?"

"Louie won't mind."

"You are absurd!"

"What could be more absurd than going to bed at midday, with your hair loose?"

"Darling, let go of my hands! I'm sure I heard the trolley."

"I'll lock the door," Jan teased her.

"And lock out my lunch? You won't."

"Of course, if your food means more . . ." Jan sat back as Louie wheeled the trolley into the bedroom. Lorely turned again to her hair, plaiting it with preoccupied, erratic fingers. Jan got up and went to the telephone.

As Louie placed the tray across her knees, Lorely heard Jan's voice, firm and charming and unanswerable, telling Mrs. Thackeray a pack of lies about her head, her heart, her need for rest. Feeling pleasantly frail, she anticipatively lifted the covers from the tray. There were an iced *consommé*, a grill with hot rolls, a caramel *crème* with sponge fingers. The Red Cross began to seem like a dream. . . .

Chapter Eight

THE CLAY FOR ADELE ARRIVED IN A LARGE PARCEL, wrapped in layers of stiff brown paper. The size and shape and weight would have told Adele what it was, even without the label of the potteries from which it came. She knew also, without telling, that Jan had sent it. At the same time as the clay, there arrived a box of modelling tools and a large volume of photographs of the work of notable sculptors.

The clay now stood on newspapers on the table in the window. It was the colour of freshly-turned red earth: raw, vital, fertile. The sight of it recalled to Adele other days when her hands had been streaked with the red-brown and there had been fruitful evidence of her work, everywhere around her. There had been her life, her urges, thoughts, perceptions, made visible in the clay. What could be hidden in this clay, this terra-cotta cliff, impregnable-seeming in the morning light? Adele stood beside

the mass and looked at it. Nothing could come from this clay save that which was within herself.

Always, before she started work, she had experienced this suspense, this quick catch of heart and body over a task that seemed too formidable, too strange, impossible of fulfilment through the frail agency of her own will and hands. But once she had started, she found she had to go on: the worst was over.

What could she start? Adele went and sat on the divan, a little way off, and looked at the clay. She liked to see it there. In this alien room, where nothing else belonged, it was hers. But what would come from it, if it were allowed to tell of herself? What contorted images of unforgotten horrors? In her eyes the mass seemed to shift slightly, to writhe. Clay was so subtle, so responsive: she would not let it know, about the camp. She was afraid, to recreate the camp. Her fingers ached a little.

Jan would want her to make something. He wouldn't understand, not even Jan would understand, that when you 'made' a thing, you expressed a thought, an opinion, if it was only about a jug, then it told of how you thought a jug should look. If you couldn't express your opinion, you ought not to make the jug, or anything else.

What should she start, in order for Jan to see that she was trying as she always did, to please him? This time he was asking her, if he knew it, not to make a thing as she made a cake, but to tell him something.

What could she tell him, of herself, that might please him? It would have to have happened since she knew Jan. But nothing had happened to her since then except Jan himself. She tried to think of any one thing that had recently stirred her, that had been seen in full clarity as possessing shape and life and meaning. There was nothing. Her sight had greyed over, like a window that had not been cleaned for years. Now, she never even looked clearly at herself; but there was a reason for that, which she would think about another time.

What could she model? She looked about the room, at the dun-coloured wallpaper, the crooked brownish oils of unloved landscapes, the green china vases on the yellow sideboard. On

the thin iron ledge of the mantel-shelf stood a brass bull-dog, a knitted wool pin-cushion, and a kind of tall brass dinner-bell. Adele got up and went over to the bell and shook it. It gave out one half of its chime, and died. It was a headless ghost of a bell.

How ugly was the room! It made Adele think of the stiff, dust-encrusted bullrushes that stand in umbrella stands in the halls of forgotten hotels.

There was a stiff paper frill in the fireplace. In front of it stood a tall narrow urn of mildewed brass, packed tightly with the furry stems of some everlasting flower that had once been white and yellow. Adele knelt down and crushed one of the flowers; it powdered to a brown ferny dust between her fingers. She blew on the brittle bouquet and dust rose from it. The flowers were little better than bullrushes. Suddenly Adele saw these years-old crumbling blooms as being all that the room held of adornment. Before the altar of the fireplace with its stiff frill of shelf-paper they were its offering, the forgotten lilies of the woman who owned also the brass dog, the voiceless bell, and the lost splendour of the once-heraldic bedspread. What was she, Adele, doing among these possessions, who had once anguished over the discarding of an alabaster chorister because there was one place only where the light from the Paris skies would touch its hem-line, and that place was already filled? What would she have done then with these flowers, with the brass dog, with anything that was in this room? She would not have laughed then but now, of a sudden, she did. She bowed over the narrow urn with its furry blooms, laughing helplessly.

Jan had never heard Adele laugh. Indeed, as he came up the stairs, he wondered if it were someone else. It was gay laughter, open and uninhibited, yet with a pretty sophisticated quality. It hardly seemed that it could be coming from the outlandish waif who knelt before the fireplace holding a vase of what looked like dead heather. But the laughter, with its hint of perfume and gentle mockery, was Adele's. Again Jan was aware of a kind of duality about her, of another personality, one that was both past and to come and for which, without reason, he continued

patiently to wait. What, now, was the joke? "Tell me . . ." he pleaded by way of introduction, and paused by the doorway so that he should not startle her.

Jan never startled Adele. She stood up without surprise and held out the urn. "They're so old," she tried to explain, "they must be the oldest flowers in London. . . ."

The laughter had filled her face, it seemed shorter, rounder. True, it had filled out in the past few weeks, the yellowish tinge had left her skin and the grey stains were fading from under her eyes. Did she know it, Jan dieted her as carefully as his father's poultry-man fattened his chickens. The stray parcels and sundries he left about were carefully chosen, as were the regular orders that now came from the grocer. He never arrived without a pint of milk in his brief-case from the plentiful stock in Mrs. Carew's pantry. He hoped she didn't count them, though probably she did. And this laughter was the result, and the brightened green eyes. Food for the body, time for the mind. There was plenty of both.

Jan took the urn. "What are they, thistles?"

"They're everlasting."

"Evidently."

"They grow on cliffs by the sea, I used to pick them. You can't believe the colours, they take the eyes right out of you! I suppose it's the salt, and the air, and the sun . . ."

Jan and Adele looked at the fusty bush he held. He remarked, "That was some time ago . . ."

"Oh, many years." Adele stooped and replaced the urn before the fireplace. Jan noted the grace with which she moved, the unconscious poise with which she straightened again. There was about her an air as sometimes lingers about very old women who have once been beautiful, not the features but the manner of beauty. About Adele, it was an air, *mondaine*, faintly provocative, not English. In this room, in those clothes, the suggestion was grotesque, a wisp of trickery twisted about what had once been, but there was the question. What had Adele been? Physically, Jan had still no idea, there was no fragment of colour or jewellery, no hint of perfume, nothing to tell him how she would dress and

look if she were whole and well and herself again. "You move very charmingly," he told her, "do you know that? I like to watch you."

Adele looked at Jan and he thought that her expression struggled as though there were something she would like to say, but could not.

Jan was right, the compliment stirred a memory in Adele. It brought a feel of silk, an awareness of bodily grace, of hidden whiteness, secret graces and delights. Compliments were a tribute to these things, to all that you did not give besides what you gave, visibly, of yourself. Compliments were a woman's birthright, you accepted them as your due. But now? What had he praised? Her movements, were they all she had left of beauty? Involuntarily, she excused herself. "I had nice things," she said, and touched her shapeless skirt, "I wasn't always like this. I used to love clothes."

Her face had the pathos of the disinherited, of the disabled, the social outcast, of all who are incomplete or unfulfilled. 'I could,' said her face . . . but what was it that she could do, or be, yet was not able? Jan thought that a direct reference to the way she looked would be less painful than evasion. "I think you deserve nice clothes," he said, "after all, what are we without them? I express myself clumsily," he smiled, "but only too accurately." He saw humour ripple through the drawn young face as though she would like to smile yet dare not. He added, "Green would suit you," then stopped, as he thought perhaps her magpie dress was her mourning. But if it were, she made no reference to the fact. "I used to wear all shades of green," she remarked, abruptly confident, "I'd a suit like a cypress, it was so dark, and silks that looked white or ivory until you looked closer. But they were green; like the stems of bluebells." The pleasure of the recollection faded. "Things like that used to matter to me."

"Don't talk like that!" Jan said sharply, "as though nothing's going to matter again. It will and you know it . . ." Again he stopped, because he hated to let his occasional irritation master him. Adele had to be whipped up sometimes or she would just lie down under life and die. But it was all mixed up with his will

not to be beaten by this weakness in her: he mustn't become overbearing. For her sake, he wanted something from her, her recovery, her return to youth, with an intensity that drove him when he saw his hopes receding. It was like the baby rabbit he'd found as a boy. For days he'd warmed it, nursed it, fed it with a fountain-pen filler, and had grown weak with rage and despair when he found that the lingering life had eluded him and gone. That was when he first knew that you could not have what you wanted. And he wanted Adele to come to life again, like the rabbit. "What are you going to do with the clay?" he asked, more gently.

Adele glanced at the clay but she did not move. She continued to study Jan. Without its habitual serenity, his pale face looked lumpy, human and fallible and kind, and she saw that he was distressed. Something would matter to her, he had said . . . but already she knew what that would be. The knowledge seared through her like a comet-trail, a white blaze of longing, certainty, and desire that she had never expected to feel again. Jan himself mattered, already, there was nothing in her life but Jan; he was her life, and while he was there she wanted to go on living. Suppose he knew? The possibility frightened her, because she thought then he might go away and not come back. She answered his question, "I'm going to model your head." Then he would have to come for sittings. Besides, she knew now: she wanted to do it.

"My head? I haven't one."

"I know," the smile behind her face softened the admission, "but I haven't another." She hesitated. There was something that she needed, that she'd seen somewhere. "Excuse me," she said, and went out to the kitchen. There was a tool-box under the cupboard and in it was a length of stout sharp wire. . . .

What was it that Jan had seen in Adele's face? There had been something, a look, a luminosity, a paling of the verdant eyes, as from some inner discharging of emotion. It was the first time he'd seen her look herself, was it? Perhaps it was the thought of working again? He was glad he'd sent the clay. He picked up a straight-backed chair and carried it to

the window and sat down judiciously where the light was strongest.

"Is it to be profile or full face?" he heard her come back. "It's not like a photograph where you can throw a back light on me and leave the rest mercifully in shadow. Except that you can throw a cloth over the whole."

"Or turn it round, if you prefer." Adele came over to the clay, "but I can't model you only in profile, unless I chop you in half or do a plaque, and you need a nose for that." He smiled. She guessed he had no illusions about his pushed-in nose. She moved round the table. "Do you mind sitting facing me? I work with my back to the light."

Adele picked up the looped wire, adjudged the approximate size and weight of Jan's head, and severed a part from the mass of clay. Then she wrapped up the main bulk of clay and dumped it on the floor. She came back to the small mound on the newspaper-covered table. "I need a board for this," she said, "and an overall. I cover myself, once I'm started." •

Jan did not move in the situation where she had placed him. "We'll get them," he said. Glancing at Adele, he saw that already her attention had strayed.

Adele had moved the clay towards her and was standing with her hands resting passively on the edge of the table, apparently doing nothing. She was waiting, as bare land waits for the incoming tide, for the first insurge of strength, the imperceptible yet prevailing encroachment which, in time, would reach her fingers and enable her to begin. Through all the channels of her being the strength was flowing slowly towards the outlet of her hands, so that her passivity, her withdrawal from all other forms of activity, was in itself an act of will. She reached out and lifted the clay between her hands.

Jan's head had no emphatic shape, it was not round or square or ovoid; like his face, it was large over all, and came out here and there where the unknown and bulbous activity within had attempted expansion. Crowned smoothly by the fine, fairish brown hair, you did not notice how lumpy it was until it grew under your fingers in its actuality, the life in your hands giving life to the clay, so that you worked on

the embryo of life and the living head seemed the replica.

Despite what she had said, after she had roughly shaped the head, Adele worked first on the profile, the definitive structure of brow, nose, mouth and chin. The eye-sockets were not deep, the large grey eyes, silvery now and veiled against the light, had their life at the surface of things; they gave and reflected readily; there was no will for concealment in these eyes nor, in their clarity, any need for it.

"Can you talk while you're working?" His question did not disturb her. Just as she could eat while reading, neither activity disturbed the other, and she said so. "When you're studying a subject," he asked, "do you try to see what it is, or only how it looks?"

"Aren't they the same?"

"I'm not sure. Sometimes, the way people look and the things they do, don't agree."

"Don't they?" Adele's tone was abstracted.

"It's hypothetical. You can guard your expression. And young people haven't one, unless it's a promise, that they mayn't keep. Can you believe a face?"

"I believe voices." Adele knew that her comments had caused Jan to glance at her, sideways, and so she kept her eyes on her work. He wouldn't believe what he saw, so he had said, he must always seek below the surface, before he accepted the truths of his own nature and others. But it was in his face! You could see that now. His whole expression was outward-looking, desiring that which was half-hidden. It was truth that he wanted, that he hoped to find, because he was true himself. How disappointed he must be, how alone! Adele felt over the cheek where she was moulding the betraying muscles, felt where control had kept them taut except for the tell-tale drag; was it sadness, or fatigue beside the mouth? Feeling moulded the face, you couldn't hide it. How could she not believe what she saw in Jan's face!

"Voices," Jan was saying, "I think there's something in it. You have a voice."

"How do you mean?"

Jan's oblique glance rested on Adele. Might it do harm or

good to tell her of the things about herself that her voice suggested to him? Her pale head with its sticking-about hair was bent over the odd-looking lump of clay. Into her face, displacing the unproductive obstinacy, had come a new kind of force, a walled-up look of absolute determination, creative and disciplined. Her thin short fingers with their square tips had earthen streaks as far as the wrists; above them, her bare arms were thin and very white. Jan looked away out of the window. "To me, your voice is civilised," he mused. "If I heard it behind a closed door, I would see a cool, poised woman, sitting with a straight back on a low chair beside a silver tea-tray. It might be china tea, with rings of lemon. Everything in the room would be studied before it was permitted to stay there. There might be a cigarette holder somewhere, a very long one, made of jasper."

"You remembered that." Adele's face had flushed. "Only it wasn't jasper, it was jade." Adele worked intently at the curve of a nostril. It seemed that every modification she allowed herself to make in the delicate depression growing under her tool had fixed permanently a part of the thought-exchange between herself and Jan; so that this line here, that hollow there, held also the gracious room, the silver tray, the open window on to the limes, the forgotten self that had poured tea, talked (but not too much); had been—what had he said?—cool, poised, so very sure of everything! "It's not quite right," she said, "that was mother's room, with the silver tray, and she never chose anything, she just kept it all. I never had any silver, not even when I married."

"Married?" Jan's head moved, he lost his pose. "Are you married?"

"I was."

"You're divorced? Or he died?"

"He's dead." That was the line beside the mouth, smoothed in, not too deeply. Adele's thoughts were there, smooth also, not too deep. It was true that she had not been happy with her husband, with Justin. But it was not true that Justin was dead. In Adele's drawer, at that moment, there reposed a letter to Mr. Humphries containing a miniature of Justin's mother that

he had requested to be sent out to him in Ceylon. He and Adele, by Adele's wish, had no direct communication with each other.

No, Justin was very much alive. But Adele had done with him years ago, before the war, and Justin knew it. She had no wish to discuss Justin with Jan. Explaining made her so tired.

"I won't talk about it, if you don't mind," she said, bending over her work. "It's over. And we weren't happy."

"Have you children?"

"How could I work, with children?" Adele glanced up at Jan and he saw the fanaticism of her feeling. "My life would have been over! I wanted to get started first, and then have children. But Justin, my husband, wouldn't agree. If I stopped working, just when I felt I was able, ready, when it was all there, I mightn't have been able to go on again. I might have destroyed the power. That was the turning-point."

"What did you do?"

"I went to Paris, into the studio of Gelin."

Jan heard the reverence with which Adele spoke even the name of the great sculptor. He asked, "How old were you?"

"Twenty."

"Was he, your husband, intolerant of your work?"

"He was——" Adele hesitated as the memory of Justin's fat unhappy face came before her eyes. He had a natural pathos which only aggravated her because she felt it was unnecessary, he didn't try, didn't help her at all, but just drew back and looked hurt. Things could have been different if Justin had been different. Adele withdrew her mind from the uncomfortable sight of Justin's face and lowered her eyes again to her work. "He was unreasonable," she answered.

Jan forbore to question Adele about her marriage. He accepted that she wished to forget it. Nothing, it seemed, had gone right for her. He changed the subject. "What was he like, Gelin? I know the work, but not the man."

"To look at?" A frosty sparkle came into Adele's green eyes. So urbane an expression did not seem to belong in the pinched face under the shorn untended hair. "He was an icicle of a

man," she said saltily. "No, colder, he looked as though he'd burn you if you touched him, like frozen metal. And so old with it, as though he'd been living for thousands of years. He'd a long beard, that seemed to have stiffened, and thick bushy brows that had turned up and congealed. His eyes looked through you, freezing, petrifying. He was wonderful! I was terrified of him."

"He sounds alarming."

"He was. He put the fear of God into you, and that was what you needed."

"It doesn't sound much fun."

"But it was fun! I've never been as happy as I was then. I made my own life. I needed nothing and no one, and I thought that nothing could take it from me, my happiness. I'd all I needed, I thought, all life as my material. That was before the war."

Jan saw the contraction in her face. "The material's still there," he said quickly, "wars pass. Life goes on."

"There's no point in it. Whatever you do's smashed. Nothing remains."

"Physically," Jan agreed, "but we can make something new. We're not beaten."

"We are beaten." Adele's face had closed in, it seemed almost to be in darkness. "Evil's the strong thing, you can't beat evil, and that destroys. Whatever you do, something will get you in the end."

"You don't believe that?" Jan felt angry. "Because some fourpenny thug, tricked out in uniform and bolstered up with guns and hot irons, has got the better of you, doesn't make him stronger than you, or the things he stands for?"

"I couldn't get away." To Adele, the argument was unanswerable.

"You could."

"I couldn't! I was a prisoner. You don't realise."

"If you'd died. Nothing could have got you then. Only your body, empty."

"If I'd lived after death," Adele said slowly, "I wouldn't have been any different. I'd still have been me. And there'd have

been something stronger than me still there to face. I worked that out."

"Don't you believe in anything? No help of any kind?"

"No," said Adele flatly, "I don't. I think we're alone. Before death, and after."

It was a commonly held viewpoint, and it saddened Jan because he knew that no words of his were likely to change it. He could not give Adele the help of his own reasoning, particularly as it had not been tried in suffering such as her own. But he could try. "We're not alone," he answered carefully, "must you think that? I think we're all one, all humans, in the sense that we're learning the same things: wisdom, self-mastery, call them the virtues, if you like. We learn by different means, and call those means circumstances. But your courage, in the camp——"

"I'd no courage!" she protested.

"Your courage," he persisted, "was no different in essence from that of anyone, anywhere, facing what he or she feared the most. I believe in time we've got to learn everything. Not in one life, but in many. It makes a long journey, but we're with the crowd."

She answered strangely, "We have enemies."

"We have allies, too. Outnumbering our enemies."

As he spoke, Jan recalled a dream he'd had, somewhere back in the 'twenties. He thought then that as he dropped asleep, he heard a light drum-roll, the sound rarefied as though it came through mountain air, so that you heard separately each of the thin insistent batons, raining together, until you could keep awake no longer but recognised the call, and had to go. And he dreamed of a great battle between good and evil, fought on a plain vaster than any he'd seen, a place where earth had stretched her boundaries to the utmost; and here were the warriors of his own side, phalanx on phalanx of living luminous scarlet, the colour in that thin air seeming so clear and absolute as almost to possess strength in itself, even without the strength of those who bore it, who were the ordinary good people of this earth. And when it was over and Jan lay awake thinking about it, he knew

that there was nothing stronger than the ordinary courage that was everywhere. But he could not prove it to Adele.

Jan looked across at her as she stood with her hands slack above the incomplected clay head. Her eyes looked past him as though they stared into a blackness where there was no guiding light. Then they came back to his. She said, "Then you believe in God?"

He rose and came across to her. "I believe in law and order," he said after a moment, "in control, despite the apparent chaos. I believe we're gathered up, when it's over."

"We suffer first."

"I don't deny it. But we get through. . . ."

"I wonder?" Adele looked up at Jan, and felt his strength as she might feel a rock against which she could lean. But, although he supported her now, she knew that he could not make her stronger than she was in herself. "I wonder?" she said again, and took comfort from his faith, even though it was not her own. "Some day we'll know."

"We'll know it all."

Adele turned back to the clay head. There was something wrong with it. She saw it, in the proximity of Jan's face to the unresponsive model. "But it's wrong!" she exclaimed, "the proportions are not right. And the expression isn't like at all."

"You've only just started it."

"I couldn't go on. Not from that." Jan stood by helplessly as Adele stared with hatred at the model. Then she lifted both her hands and took hold of the clay head and squeezed it. Now it was Jan who felt defeated. Then Adele looked up at him from the ruin she had made. Instead of the despair that he expected Jan saw in her face, like the thin scarlet of his dream, her determination, threaded with laughter at his dismay.

"I'll do it again," she said.

Chapter Nine

JAN HAD DETERMINED THAT NOTHING should keep him from Adele except such circumstances as he himself arranged and for which she could be prepared. When he was going to be away for a day or two, which rarely happened, he told her himself; he took extra food, things for her to do, a book for her to read and comment upon when he returned. She knew the day, the exact hour when to expect him. In his absence, he supported her as strongly as when he was there. There was no possibility of her dying on him, as the rabbit had done.

At the beginning of October Jan's father died, quietly, in his sleep at Cluer. Lorely was already there. Within an hour of getting the message, Everett and Lena had driven Jan down with them to Cluer. Jan had managed to send a telegram to Adele, but that was all.

Those few days away from Adele, four in all, brought home to Jan how far his interests had strayed from home and family affairs. Here was the clan, drawn close, curbed and quietened by bereavement. He was a part of it. There were problems of title and property, the probability of greatly increased wealth, discussions, the administration of the farm to consider, the small yet notable changes in the *Record's* policy, proposed by Everett. These things and many others were the substance of his life, past and present. They should matter. Yet Jan felt an emptiness, a persisting void of boredom and loneliness that he could not explain.

They carried his father's small coffin high on their shoulders down the gravel path between the stiff yews to the tiny Norman church whose name was in the Domesday book. The light from the fourteenth-century clerestory windows filtered on to the white chalk walls and declared the brilliant life of the flowers that rested above the dead. Jan found himself in the family pew facing, as from boyhood, the highly-polished bronze plaque that commemorated one, Anne, 'a despiser of ye world and a high prizer of ye Lord Christ'. The date on it was sixteen-fifty-seven.

Jan had never liked this lady and he felt no differently now. Because it was his filial duty to feel something, Jan could feel nothing, no emotion, none of the sad and disturbing thoughts that he knew must come later. Only the emptiness.

At first Jan thought that the emptiness was a part of his loss, the precursor of grief. But as he led the brief procession of mourners across the churchyard to the family burial-ground in the golden forenoon; the stiff black, the nocturnal veils, moving through the gold light against the mountain ash on the old high walls, and under the green-gold of the failing leaves; he remembered another burying-ground, the charnel pit, and the bodies that had been living in that place, the spectre that had been Adele; and the thought pierced him with triumph and thanksgiving: 'She's not like that now.'

There, then, was the emptiness, the not knowing about Adele. For three days he'd had no word, no sight of her. He could not search her face for those small signs of her progress of which she herself was unaware: little expressions, the settled look that told she had a good night, with no bad dreams. Jan feared Adele's dreams; they flooded her with terror and futility, all the good and hopeful humours that he had reclaimed, lost for hours, even for days, in her conviction that what had been before must come again. Only a continual looking-forward, Jan knew, kept Adele from looking back. Was she looking back now that he was away, even though he had explained, had written? There was the telegram on the first day, he'd written next day, and would write again tonight. Tomorrow he might get back; if not, certainly he would see her on the day after. If only she were on the phone, but he thought that the whole business of putting it in, might be too much for her. When would she feel like other people again? There was so much still to be done.

Despite this preoccupation with Adele, Jan had never considered whether he loved her as a man loves a woman. To his mind, she was a task that he had set himself, something that he was determined to accomplish, to see her on her feet again, able to carry on her life. Beyond this point, he had never looked. Bodily, there had once been a look of death in her, something

that was not whole and healthy and normal, that had stayed desire. Even though this look had passed, the impossibility of desiring her was fixed in his consciousness, was something to do with the camp and all that was disordered there. Perhaps, also, this continued attitude was deliberate, since it absolved him from other responsibilities.

There had been some talk, not too assertive as the will had not then been read, as to the probable handing over of the Carlton Terrace house. As the principal legatee, it had always been assumed that this would go to Everett in keeping with his new situation as owner of the *Record*, Jan having disclaimed his responsibilities. Jan certainly did not covet the enormous mausoleum of a house, he was only waiting for an excuse to get out of it and set about finding a small town house for himself and Lorely. On the other hand Lena, Everett's wife, had visions of life at Carlton Terrace. To her, the house and the way she and Everett would live in it, would set the final seal on the predatory accomplishments of her life: no one that she knew could go any better. She was not deliberately sitting about like a vulture waiting for its prey but that, in truth, was what she was doing and to Jan, it was how she looked. So that when the lawyer read out that Nathaniel had left the Carlton Terrace house to Lorely, Jan felt a sudden thump of pleasure at the sight of Lena, that glittering watchful bird, suddenly denuded of her prize; and at Lorely, in her careful mourning and authentic grief, for once with the advantage; even though he had no idea what he was going to do about it.

Two days previously, Jan had written briefly to Adele, telling her only the facts of what had happened and when he expected to be back. But on the night of the funeral, as he sat at the desk in the darkened library within the pale ambient of the reading lamp, he felt the emptiness that was in him full with all that he wanted to say to Adele. He wanted to speak, not to the scarcely-civilised apparition in the hideously regimented dress, but to the personality that was also Adele, with the cool mind, the enthusiasm, the perception of small things and the love of them. He thought as he drew the notepaper towards him, that

you did not know your opinion of people until you started to write to them. . . .

'MY DEAR ADELE,' he began, 'I am writing this very late. Everyone is in bed, and I wonder if you are asleep yet, and what sort of a day you have had? I wish I had said in my last letter, to write down what you have been doing, the little things you will not remember yourself the next day. I shall post this tonight, but you will not get it till tomorrow evening. By the following morning, about ten-thirty, I shall be with you and it will be too late for you to start writing the things I shall see for myself!

'I expect I seem a long way away, not in miles but in circumstances. Certainly we take a long journey when we travel a few miles to lay out of sight for ever, a person who has been a part of life from the beginning. We think, disturbingly, of old mistakes, and how we could have done differently. Time stands still for us to stop and think, when it is too late. At such times I think we are not quite in this world but stranded somewhere between it and the next, looking back to the old and forward to the new, to the new chance to do better, if we can. I could not live if I thought that death threw away all that we have learned of life.

'So these thoughts bring me back to you, who are a part of life. And I hope that you are eating well, and doing a little work, and have found something of interest on the radio? What did you think of those canned grapes? Were they any good? The man did not recommend them (!) but that was because they had been a long time in store. He had not tried them. I need a taster when I go shopping for you—like the hounds of the Borgias!

'I hope you have not had any more nightmares? It is ten days since the last. They are getting farther apart and I believe that one day they will be—well, only a bad dream. You say they make you feel alone. Please do not think that. You are never alone while I think of you.

'JAN.'

Chapter Ten

ADELE WAS DRESSING when she received Jan's telegram to say that he would not be coming for a few days. She stood in her slip on her stockinged feet at the bottom of the stairs and felt like a piece of creaking machinery, a very old tractor or a decrepit bus, that had lumbered to a standstill. For weeks and weeks she had been gathering herself together, piecing this part with that, making do without the components that were missing: she was tied up with string, but she went. She'd a journey to make, in the twenty-four hours of each day, and a destination, which was Jan. Now she had stopped; she had nowhere to go and no reason for going. It seemed pointless even to turn back up the stairs. . . .

Her newly-ironed blouse was suspended carelessly on its hanger from the top of the wardrobe door, which was ajar. Adele took it down mechanically as she passed. What was the good of it? What was the good of getting dressed at all? She might as well go back to bed.

As Adele passed by the head of the bed, the door of the wardrobe swung outwards with a faint creak. Adele turned at the sound. Inside the wardrobe door, was a mirror. In it, Adele saw the ghost of herself.

It made her jump to see this stranger standing there by the bedpost with large dilated eyes, clutching a blouse that was scarcely more chalky-white than her own bare flesh. Never had she permitted herself to be caught by this too-large mirror. The small circle of mirror in the bathroom reflected only the necessary sections of herself, so that she need not see the whole, completely.

The two Adeles stared at each other. Because she was no longer in any hurry, the real Adele could not slam the door on her mirrored self and pretend that she had not seen, that she was too busy and there were other things to do that were more important. There was nothing else to do. She could stand there all day, if she wished, and take a really good look at herself.

A while back, before Jan came, she could not have made the

mental effort to concentrate on what she saw, whether it were herself or any other object. After that, she became afraid of what she might see. And of late, she had not had time; there was always something to do that was hurrying her on towards Jan.

Was this herself? This big-eyed apparition with the straight hair, in the plain skimpy petticoat that had not even a daisy on it to help fill her out where most she needed it? Laying aside the blouse, Adele went up to the mirror, so close that she could see the yellow in her eyes, the flecks of tarnished bronze, that identified her to herself. Nothing changed your eyes except death, that turned them to blobs of coloured jelly.

How transparent her face appeared! Although the ugly hollows had filled, the flesh was laid so lightly over the bones, you could see them still, stretching the skin across the very wide brow, the rather broad cheek-bones and smoothly rounded chin. By virtue of this declension in width, her face was the shape of a seashell. You could not see it before, under the sturdy flesh of her youth; but now, it was interesting to realise that all the while there had lain, out of sight, these rare outlines.

It was irrefutable she didn't look sick any more, or rotten, or cadaverous, or any of the things that might make people stare at you and wonder what you were doing out of your coffin; merely convalescent, perhaps, with a look of pallor, a translucency, a tendency for the blue to show under the skin like the pale sea-veins of the shell. Her face needed colour, something to warm the eyes and to show once again that she had a mouth. Most women looked at death's door, anyway, without make-up.

Emboldened, Adele stepped back a pace and looked critically at her shoulders. They had always sloped, rather in the manner of a graceful flagon and, if they were narrower now, at least there were no heavy gawky bones to expose. She pushed her straps off her shoulders, down to her waist, she stepped free of everything.

What a peaky bony body! What could you do with that? Her immediate impulse was to cover herself with a sack of a dress, belted tightly at the only point where her diminution would be acceptable. But that would be craven. If she were

going to dress herself again, responsibly, she should stress fearlessly what she was; people always concentrated on the faults you tried to hide.

Adele was shivering. The room was not cold but she was in the grip of a nervous tension, as she was when she began a new task of work and felt, as she always did, that she had started too soon, she was not ready, not strong enough, did not know where to begin. There was no evading it now: she looked extraordinary and it was partly her own fault, she did nothing of any kind to help herself. Look at her breasts! They were very small, but they were there; if you confined them within some definite shape, you would be able to see that!

Adele pulled on her wrapper and sat down on the bed. Who would see her? Only Jan. It would be all for him, the make-up, the pointed breasts under the new dress. Would he not know it? She would enter the fray again, the old conflict of woman against other women, and against men, even the man you loved. She might lose, if she tried to compete with normal women, ordinary women with full bodies and confidence. Oh, confidence! To be back in Paris, full of health and desire and the conviction that no one in the world was quite so interesting as yourself.

As she was now, she could not lose. She'd no competition against her ugliness, her helplessness. Jan would never forsake her while she remained like this.

Wouldn't he? He was a man, she was a woman; it was the fundamental fact, you couldn't ignore it for ever. Would he not despise her in the end because, as a woman, she had failed to provoke him? Even though he might not admit it, to himself, as to anyone else? Sex was cruel, its laws unsubdued. Because of sex, love was full of fear.

Whatever happened, she couldn't go on like this. Now she had seen herself clearly, she must do something about it. She never wanted to put on again the dull heavy stockings, the clumpy shoes that were strapped like a child's. She craved instead her woman's armour, the impregnable gossamer mesh of a fine stocking, safeguarding the interests of a delicate ankle

above the deceptive fragility of a small shoe built on an iron-strong last to hold you straight, ankle, leg, and tensile body, beyond reproach.

Adele drew up her wrapper an inch or so. Her ankles, if anything, were improved and her feet were very small. Pierrot had modelled her feet, she remembered, had he still the cast? Where were they now, the tiny plaster feet, whose originals Pierrot had held between his hands and kissed, the white feet that had run, so many times, to his bed? Where was Pierrot himself? Not that it mattered now. She still had her pretty feet.

Could she do it? Could she recreate, physically, the person she had once been, out of this new material, the wasted body, the uncertainties that had replaced the untried assurance of her youth? Supposing she failed? Might not her attempt at grace make her appear even more graceless, more outcast than before? How much safer would it be, to put on the old concealing clothes, her smock, and make the final adjustments to Jan's head; so that when he came he would look at the model and not at herself, at what she could do, rather than what she was?

But she wanted him to look at her! And if he didn't like her? It was a risk she must take. But he was always wanting her to take an interest, how could he not be pleased, that she had made the effort? Suddenly Adele felt a surge of confidence. Jan was so kind, he was not the heartless male who judged you by the inch too much or too little, in places where you couldn't help it. Jan would know that she had been afraid, weak, despairing, that she was too flat, too thin, and it was not her fault. He would know that although she dreaded to go out, she had gone, he only would not know that she had gone because of him.

If he had been coming today, tomorrow, she could not have done it. Only because she had these few days, quite alone, with no one looking at her, to be very slow, to gather her resources gradually, was it possible . . . there was so much to do, it must be all or nothing. Not one of these dull garments, she thought as she dressed, would she ever wear again. She would make a parcel of them, like the man in Jan's story, and lay it in the gutter.

In the hand-bag that she never used was the bank-book Mr. Humphries had given to her some months ago. She had several hundred pounds and she knew that her allowance had been accumulating, she spent so little. Within her own range, there was nothing she could not buy. She had even an extra allowance of clothing coupons, unused.

There was gold in the day. You could tell how blue would be the sky in the country where the leaves would be curling and drying and would soon be falling in showers of brittle gold through the blue and the stillness on no wind. Somewhere in the country was Jan.

Adele hurried across the cobbled yard in the sun in her cloppitty shoes, and never once thought of the camp.

Chapter Eleven

THEY TOOK HURRICANE LAMPS TO LOOK AT THE HOUSE, when they got back from Cluer; as though the house had not been on top of them for years and before that Jan had lived there, and Jan's father; as though Jan and Lorely did not know already each room, all of the low sprawling attics, each turn of the great winding stair, all now given over to emptiness and night.

The globes of soft fire in their grilles of iron broke a luminescent cloud in the darkness through which they moved, up the stairs, she ahead, he following. Jan grumbled, "What do you expect to see? You won't be able to see anything, in any case. Might just as well wait till tomorrow. I'm hungry. I want my dinner."

"I had to see it."

"You've seen it before."

"It wasn't mine." Lorely lifted the lantern ahead of her and straightened a little, moving proudly up the stairs that were hers, towards the great rooms, the many rooms, romantic and splendid and fantastic, all hers. Over her black dress, in place of the austere coat she had worn at the funeral, she had slipped a black cloak held at the throat by a pair of clasped hands, in onyx. As

she moved the cloak swung outwards from her shoulders in lines unbroken and noble. There would be a fire-flash from the onyx, a sable gleam in the heavy hair above the white and glowing skin. Thus might a great lady mount to her chambers in days far-gone, lit by the smoking flare of torches held aloft in other hands than hers, slave-hands, and she their queen.

The bare boards of the huge drawing-room on the first floor gave back the light sharp fall of Lorely's high heels and shook slightly under Jan's heavy disgruntled tread. The twin clouds of light commingled over an area of the heavy embossed wallpaper that by day had the appearance of wine-red brocade but was now of a blackish-purple hue, convulsively-patterned. Jan waved his lamp and the colour spread up the wall like an old wine-stain. "Dragging us up here to look at that. Wouldn't you rather forget it?"

"It's a fine paper," Lorely said loyally, "you can't see it in this light."

"I don't want to, except perhaps under a glass case in the Victoria and Albert Museum."

"I like it." With her lantern raised, Lorely went close to the wall and ran her fingers over the raised pattern.

Jan watched the wandering white hand and felt sure that Lorely was not considering the design of the paper at all. Her expression had filmed over as it did whenever some fantasy possessed her thoughts and left her body to its trance-like motions, without direction. "I like it," she repeated vaguely, "I'd like one similar, in purple."

Still Jan felt that she had not spoken what was in her mind. Some image was forming there of which the colour purple was, so far, its only outward expression. Until he knew more, Jan did not want to stiffen her determination by opposing her. Lorely's myths had to be treated with respect because she had a way of translating them into reality with a force that was anything but mythical. He asked her lightly, "Where?"

"Not here." She turned to him vaguely, not seeing him, "This is going to be white, all different kinds of white, and gold. But the purple I want for myself, in my room."

"Which room?"

"The one above this. Let's go and look at it."

"Tomorrow." But she was already half-way to the door, floating through her cloud of light in that maddening cloak on her way, you'd think, to some histrionic death-bed.

Another warehouse of a room, clammy and chill; nobody was going to get him to sleep up here. They stood just within the doorway, straining their eyes through the cavernous gloom beyond the inappropriate lamps. "I'm going to have purple paper," Lorely said slowly, "and a white carpet. And a white bed, like a gigantic boat, a gondola. And swans."

"Swans? Where?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the bed might be a swan, don't you think, with the long neck for the head, curving over?"

"We could get a nice flat in St. James, or a small house, good square rooms and a decent heating system. Purple paper won't warm this room."⁶

"We could put in central heating."

"We could go somewhere where it's already there. I'm not a millionaire."

"It wouldn't cost so much, a few thousand," Lorely's tone became exalted, "but you could never buy a house like this!"

"You're right. I wouldn't. I lived in it for twenty years and I know what I'm talking about."

"But you don't, you can't see at all how it'll be."

Lorely went forward into the room. The movement cut her off, isolated her in light, leaving a deep trough of shadow between herself and Jan. She lifted her head to the darkness and felt the radiance fall upon it that was to come, of the lyrical flames of the purple candles burning in the white candalabras.

"It's the way men and women should live," she pronounced, "the way they used to in the days when women wore real dresses, long and flowing, and men fought duels for them and wrote them songs and ballads. They'd rooms like this then, great halls, and musicians, like we could have down in the gallery. That's how this house could be."

"Only it'll probably be a school. There'll be twenty young

ladies sleeping in this room, and they won't be any different from your young ladies. They'll get their ballads . . ."

"A school!" Lorely came to earth so quickly, Jan saw he should have been more cautious. "I'm not going to sell it! I'm going to live in it."

"Where do I come in?"

She came to him quickly, contrite. "Darling, you should be proud. It's a wonderful house. No one'll have a house like ours . . ."

"I'm not going to live here." He stared down at her, his face wooden and impassive, conscious only of the will to break out of this threatened web of illusion, to get himself a real house, a man's house, a house like everybody else's. "The house is impracticable in every way," he pronounced, "it's too big, too cold, too grandiose. It's only fit for an embassy, not for two simple people like you and me."

"Your father lived here." She was going to be difficult.

"He was used to it. But he's gone now, and so has everything this house stands for."

"People still have big houses. People with titles."

"I can live in a mud hut if I wish, title and all. I'd drop the title before I lived here."

Lorely said queerly, "You never loved your father at all. All the things he did, he was so clever, such a wonderful person, but you never thought so. You don't want any of it, his house, his name, the paper. Everett's his son, not you."

"Sell the house to Everett." They hurt, the things she said, because they were true and he did not know why, how to explain this curious enmity with the people he loved, his father, Everett, Lorely herself.

"I'll never sell it, to Everett or anyone. Why did he leave it to me?"

"He knew Lena wanted it."

"He knew I loved it."

"And he knew I didn't." There it was, the amusement in the dark eyes, the unspoken laughter to which there was no answer. Jan's father was not under the heavy clay at Cluer, he was here

in this room and he was not changed at all. Why should death sanctify you? It was absurd.

"He wanted me to have it. We talked about it. Your father agreed with me that people don't understand romance, they're like you, they want to turn lovely houses into schools and clubs, instead of living in them like they did when life was beautiful and exciting, and no one was ashamed of it!"

"It's not romance they're ashamed of, it's the bills."

"Your father said romance was a lost art."

"It's an expensive one."

"There are people with money. But their lives are unromantic."

"How do you know?"

The lanterns swung as they moved, joining them fitfully; yet the dark gap between them might have been an unbridgeable chasm. Because Lorely could not think of an answer, she fell back on the unanswerable authority. "Your father said so."

"Did father say he was leaving you the house?" The sudden suspicion made Jan feel he had been tricked.

"I'd no ideal!"

"You talked it over."

"Not this house—any house."

"I wonder why he left it to you and not to Everett?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"No real reason, I suppose." Jan saw Lorely's big aggrieved eyes and realised how improbable it was that there had been anything between herself and his father. As though Lorely could hide anything from anyone! Yet, for a moment, it had been like suddenly seeing a stranger in his garden: he never gardened, and Lorely was difficult. But his property was his property.

She came to him across the step of darkness. "Darling, couldn't father have left the house for us, to make a home? It could be so wonderful, if you'd be interested. You can't see it. I can."

"You can't do anything with it," he said tiredly. "It's all too big. It makes me feel like a pea in a drum, always has done."

"It won't seem big, darling. We'll have fur rugs, and big

fires in winter, with logs. Firelight makes people look so different."

"But why should we look different? Why can't we be ourselves in a house of a reasonable size? You can have a free hand in any other place we can find."

"We will be ourselves," her large mesmerised eyes appealed to him, "what chance have we had to live, really live? We could make a world of our own. Nothing outside it would matter. We could pretend we were a thousand miles from London, in another land. Anything . . ."

Again Jan felt himself being drawn into a kind of fatal bondage whose ties were all the more unbreakable for their unreality. She tried to hold him with the past, with his early passion for her that had died because it was illusory, but that she still believed existed, and would return. He struggled to get away, to free himself yet from her world of fantasy and his own continuing failure there.

"No, my dear," he said gently, "we couldn't pretend. You can pretend, but I can't. I'm a modern, not a romantic."

She could not see that he was holding back from her, she took his words literally. "Not only pretend, darling. It'll be real, I promise. If only I could tell you about it now, but I've got to sit down and think, plan it all, get someone to draw plans and things, someone who can paint a picture so that you can see beforehand how it'll all be. There are people . . ."

"I can see it without any picture."

"You can't, I know! Perhaps if I could get the picture painted, if someone could do it, who understands drama, colour, how to use big spaces . . ."

"You don't want an artist. You want a stage designer, someone like Jules Menier. But I don't intend to live on a permanent stage set."

"Jules Menier, that's the man! I wonder if he'd do it, if I paid him, if I offered him—how much do you think?"

"For what?"

"To design this house, my room."

"He wouldn't do it."

"He might. I think he would." There had been the way Jules had looked at her on the night of the party; it was not the look of someone who was going to refuse what you asked, if you were careful, if you dressed to look like the person you were going to be when this house was finished, a rich exciting dress for the rich exciting setting someone like Jules could create. . . . Lorely seemed suddenly to see Jules, here in this empty room, with the lantern-glow in his dark eyes. There were stuffs in his hands, he flung down a length for her to see, it flowed at her feet, the glimmering fabulous cloth of silver and purple.

"Who's going to pay him?"

"I am."

They stared at each other across the gulf of shadow that was once more between them. It was as though it were not natural for them to remain close together, so that, imperceptibly, their movements attested to the unseen distances dividing them.

Jan began carefully, "Haven't I made it clear?" But she flung back at him, to check his protest. "The picture, Jan, only the picture! For you to see it, beforehand."

"I don't wish to see it," he had intended to speak more quietly, "I don't want you to think of the house in any way. We're not going to live here."

She saw herself losing. "You're a selfish man," she cried wilfully, knowing it to be unfair. "If I wanted to move, you'd want to stay, no matter how big or cold it was. You only want to annoy me!"

The lamp in Jan's hand jerked with his sudden movement and the light from it leapt at the darkness. "I hate this house!" he declared. "I don't care what you do, it's the last place I'd live in! But if I did live in it, it would be in a normal ordinary way, and not surrounded by purple paper and beds like swans! I want a quiet life, a simple ordinary place. Not these extreme fancies."

"My ideas are not extreme! I could make it all wonderful, full of beautiful things, colour, works of art from famous homes that have been sold, ancient chateaux. I know how, you don't . . . you don't understand, you've no taste."

"But we're not grantees, exiled royalty! This isn't a chateau! It's ridiculous."

"It's you who're ridiculous. You've this valuable house, that people would pay thousands for, and money to live in it. Yet you want to live somewhere ordinary, dull, not exciting at all."

"It's not places that are exciting. It's people. . . ."

"But people make them! It's what I'm saying . . . we wouldn't be so dull if we didn't live as we do. Here's our opportunity, to be different. You've never seen me as I could be if I tried, if you'd let me."

She was so earnest, so full of anxiety. Jan seemed to see her, wandering about her bizarre palace, irrationally attired, forever changing her outward dress yet remaining perpetually herself. Good, well-meaning . . . but dull. Did it matter, if the illusion kept her occupied, amused?

She was bored, he knew that, but her boredom came of her own unintelligence. Nothing interested her for long because she had not sufficient mind with which to be interested. If she'd had a child, she wouldn't have been bored then. What did he do, to amuse her? An occasional show, a week-end drive, an evening with friends—his friends. It wasn't much. She bored him so badly, when they went out . . . or at home, for that matter.

Yet she did her best, he was aware of her loyalty as a rock-like foundation to life. She would never desert him or betray him. He could decorate a hundred houses, he knew, if she thought it was going to please him. Why should he deny her this? Wherever they went, she would be the same.

"I could have such fun," she pleaded, and knew he was weakening.

"Why not do up a smaller place?" it was his last chance. "Why this one?"

"Because it was your father's, and he gave it to me. It belongs to us."

Suddenly Jan realised that in Lorely's eyes there was a glamour about the house, the glamour of his father's personality. He remembered how his father had fascinated Lorely at their first

meeting and wondered, obscurely, whether something of his father's attraction had attached to himself, and that had been one reason why she married him?

"You'd have a garden with a small place," she liked gardening. "You could keep a swan, we'd put it in the agreement."

"You're laughing at me. I don't mean a real swan. I mean a china one, or a pair perhaps, with flowers in."

"Not in my room."

"You could have the room that opens out of here. It has a window on to the Mall. You could furnish it as you pleased."

"How kind of you! I see I shall have to, if it's a choice between sleeping alone and sleeping with a swan."

A happy smile dispelled the anxiety in Lorely's face. She liked bedroom jokes, a bedroom was the one place where a woman could get her own way. If Jan was talking about beds, she knew it would be all right.

"Don't worry, 'love. I won't lock the door," she lifted the lamp and peered towards the door of the dressing-room in the opposite corner, "I don't think there's a key . . ."

It seemed to be the darkness that was moving rather than the lamp that Lorely carried. Gigantic shadows were pushing the light over so that it appeared like a little yellow moon bobbing about in a sky that was too big for it.

He called after her, but she took no notice. "Don't bother now. Let's go down."

In the light of the raised lantern, Jan saw clearly the closed door. A thought stirred in his sub-conscious, that in time to come he might be glad of this diversion of Lorely's interests and of all that the closed door could imply. Why or when, or what might be coming, he did not question. The thought was little more than a tremor under the surface of things, the movement of unseen life, quickly stilled. He said, finally, "I'm going down."

Lorely was not listening or did not hear because he was so far away. As she opened the closed door, she remarked, "You couldn't really call it separate rooms, could you?"

Turning, she saw across the darkness that Jan had gone. But

she was not dismayed. After a moment's irresolution she stepped inside the room for just a quick look. "After all," she said aloud, raising the lamp to the unanswering walls, "it's a very nice room."

Chapter Twelve

ADELE'S DOOR WAS CLOSED. Not the downstairs door, but the one at the top leading directly to her sitting-room. Jan stood outside it and was afraid to go in. What had happened in four days to close this door that had never been closed since he had known Adele? For something must have happened. The flowers that he carried grew as heavy as a spurned gift in his arms. Was she there? Fear, failure, suicide, he tried not to think of them. He would have dashed in but more prosaic considerations deterred him. All women closed their doors sometimes . . . why not Adele? As he lifted his hand to knock, he heard her call out, "Come in."

At first, he could not find her. The familiar school-girlish figure with the bunchy black skirt, white blouse, and cropped hair, was not there, was nowhere in the room. Instead, there stood in the window a tiny figure, impeccably groomed yet with that air of defencelessness, of beauty unprotected, that opens doors, that commands the doffed cap, the chivalrous gesture, the cloak down-flung in the rain. . . . Most women, all too obviously, could look after themselves. But not Adele.

It was not only Adele's dress that conveyed this impression of rarity; nor her features, now delicately bloomed with make-up. Her hair, chastely-styled and brushed upwards from the nape of her neck, glittered like silver-gilt. She wore a high-necked dress of an almost monastic simplicity, of flawless cut. The dress was a neutral greyish-fawn, the colour of a vole, or of any other small soft field animal. Her breasts were rounding. Her waist, narrowly-belted, was extraordinarily small. Her shoes matched the dress. She had beautiful ankles.

There was an air of antiquity about her, Jan thought, as of

some small statuette, fragile and finely-wrought, fashioned in any era from the mysterious and inherent pathos of her womanhood. There was no modernity in her face; only this ageless look of peril and delicacy.

She was as frightened as he had been when he stood outside her door . . . it was in her expression, her tension, her unbearable suspense as his eyes passed over her. He wanted to burst out, 'It's all right! Don't be afraid.' But he dared not take for granted the communication between them, those exchanges of love and confidence, so sure because they were as yet unspoken.

Her hands were clasped before her, too tightly. Her eyes, widely-spaced and misty green, were pleading 'like me, don't judge me.' Did she not know, was she not certain, that he was as a man who lays his eyes on his heart's desire and is not betrayed?

For here it was, the marsh-light that had been dancing before Jan from the first moment he came across Adele in the camp. At last it had come to a standstill, had flowered before his eyes into this gentle luminance that was the mystery of Adele, revealed. And in the same revelatory instant, Jan knew that it was he, and no one else, who had brought this to pass. It was for him, that Adele had come to life.

She was his. The knowledge drove his blood with a sudden shocking desire, to claim her now, the flowering delicacy warming and unfolding in his arms, his body lost in hers as, already, his heart and thoughts were lost. . . . He could take her in this moment . . . and lose her, as immediately. In her eyes he would have come from the jungle. And in his own. Because he was a man and not an animal, desire died as swiftly as it had lived.

He held out the flowers he carried. "I'm glad I brought these," he said, "more than glad."

Adele took the flowers, feeling that surely, oh surely, there could be nothing wrong with her, if Jan looked at her with that sudden weakening about his mouth and in the grey eyes that she had never seen other than temperate and gentle. He would break, she could see it, she could break him like any other man. But because he was Jan, she would have it that he asked nothing of life but to be broken, by her. . . .

The flowers were winter roses, dark red and cream. She drew back the tissue paper as she might uncover the face of a baby. "Roses," she remarked, not seeing them clearly, "where did you get them?"

"I don't know what it was that made me get these. I felt something had happened."

"I couldn't go on," she hadn't meant to tell him, "I felt such a fool."

"You've been out."

"I had to."

"Did it upset you?"

"I couldn't help if it did. I took so much money," she smiled a little, "nobody looked at me."

"Were you very nervous?"

"I was, in the first few shops. But I meant to get what I wanted, and I did. And I had my hair done first, and got my shoes and stockings. It wasn't so bad."

"Which day was this?"

"The day of the telegram. But I didn't finish till yesterday."

"And I never knew."

"Why should you?"

It was the first time, by even so little, that she had consciously opposed him. Although her heart shook, she dared not retract. Suppose he thought she was trying to catch him? She took the flowers over to the sideboard, to the pair of green china vases. "Why should you know what I was doing?" she continued perversely, "or even think of me?"

"I always think of you."

"Why?"

Adele spoke lightly, but she turned to watch Jan's reply. He noticed that there were tiny pearls in her pierced ears, and others, small and lustrous, at her throat. How much trouble had she taken! What could he say? Any words of love that he spoke now, she would attribute only to this change in her appearance. Yet he had loved her long before, for reasons that he did not himself know. In her old clothes, he would have gone to her, taken her in his arms, told her that she mattered to him always,

no matter why. Now he shrank from approaching her, would have cut off his hand before he touched her. Eluding her question, he replied levelly, "I like to guess what you're doing. If only to see if I'm right."

"But you didn't guess this time?"

"No."

"No one can know everything about anyone . . ."

"Perhaps it's just as well."

"I suppose . . . does anyone know you come here?"

"I don't think so."

"Not your wife?"

"No one."

So he had a wife. Adele seemed to be seeing Jan more and more clearly now, as though she had never dared to look at him before. He was so big, so dignified in his restrained clothes, momentous and yet quiet, through and through. Of course he had a wife. . . .

A tinge of fear stained Adele's thoughts. What made her think she could keep Jan? How easily she could lose him. . . .

It gave Jan a slight shock to mention Lorely. He did not wish Adele to think of anything concerning him that was outside their personal story. He was jealous of her regard, afraid that it might be spoiled. Suddenly he wanted urgently to know just why she had made this unexpected effort, and how much it had to do with himself. "Something happened while I was away," he asked abruptly, "what was it?"

"I caught sight of myself in the mirror. That was all." All that she dared tell him.

"That couldn't have been the first time."

"I've been shutting my eyes in the mirror."

"What made you open them?"

"I suppose I just didn't shut them quickly enough! After that, I couldn't."

"It wasn't as bad as that."

"You never said anything."

"I preferred to wait."

"Did I surprise you?"

"It's happened so quickly! You wouldn't stir out just a few days ago, even in the car. You didn't like strangers, crowds, traffic, anything outside these four walls. And now you've been out to shops, public places, talking to people, having your hair done, your nails painted——"

"I painted them myself."

"You bought the paint. You went out and asked for it, and everything else. What happened?"

"I . . . just wanted to."

"But why? Why then?"

Adele longed to say, 'It was for you . . . all for you . . .' Jan thought he wanted to know. But when he knew, it might be different. He was a man. All men ran away if you ran after them. Turning to the sideboard she began, erratically, to unwrap the flowers. "I don't know," she said weakly.

Adele's hands were trembling. Jan noticed them, and saw also how the pale-tinted nails detracted attention from the squareness of her finger-tips. He was glad that he had, as it were, seen Adele unpainted. When you came to think of it, your outward appearance was no more than a show put on by yourself, dressed, painted, mimed, everything. With luck no one saw behind the scenes. This, then, was Adele's show behind which, from now on, she would try to hide herself, her strivings, her memories. He must never forget what he had seen. . . .

He was anxious now about those trembling hands. He went across to her and picked up the ugly green vases. "I'll get you some water," he said, "you can be doing the flowers."

Jan sat in a straight chair and watched Adele as she set the roses in the high graceless shiny vases. What had happened in those hours, those mysterious magical hours, that had transformed her into this desirable yet unknown woman? It was comparable to the transition from formless twelve-years-old to burgeoning thirteen; the overnight miracle that was no miracle but the assertion of natural law. Something that would have happened anyway, whether he had come into Adele's life or not? Jan was losing some of his confidence.

Adele lingered over the roses. The blood was knocking at her

heart, and she was thankful for something to do. It was so long, too, since she had seen a flower at all. How ardent they were in colour, yet cool to the touch, the damask crimson, the unflawed petals. . . . Their perfume reached her heart and became thought, a drift across her mind of gentle hours, other rooms, other roses, fat and tumbling; other days. She could have kissed each one before she set it in its unworthy holder.

"Have you really changed, Adele?" There was a suggestion of sadness in Jan's voice that made Adele afraid to turn, to see, perhaps, the same sadness in his eyes. She would keep her secrets, whatever the cost. She would not give him her pride. She countered, as calmly as she could, "Didn't you want me to change?"

"What I wanted hasn't a great deal to do with it." In Jan's own ears, the comment sounded petulant. It cut him absurdly, that Adele was keeping secrets from him, when she had shared so confidently the least details of her life.

"What did you want?" In her face, there was a tremor of the old Adele, looking out anxiously for his approval. He answered, "To be with you when it happened. That's all. I feel I've missed something."

"Not much."

"Some very important days."

Again, Adele trembled on the verge of telling him how dreadful it had all been, how she'd hated every moment until she got back here with her trophies, the loot of her desperate foray on the outside world. But it would spoil the effect. If he once guessed that she was unchanged, inwardly as frightened and useless as ever, he would know that it was for him alone that she was all decked out, no better than a peacock, its plumage spread fully. And if he came near her, the strength and warmth and homeliness of him, she would never resist, she wouldn't last a moment. She lifted her head. "Does it matter? You can see what happened."

Jan could have gone to her, shaken her, forced the story out of her. But the memory of his earlier desire still shamed him. He changed the subject. "Those pearls. I like them. Did you buy those, too?"

Adele was curiously disappointed. She had wanted Jan to go on, to drive from her the admission that it was all for him, everything that she owned, or did, or was. Pretending tired her. She fingered the string of small creamy pearls. "They were mother's," she explained, "I got her jewel-case from the bank."

"Have you got it here?"

"Some of it."

"Keep them in a safe place." Jan thought of the doors she left open.

"No one will find them." It was true, and the fact still caused Adele wonderment. This was something she could tell Jan. The relief of it, to let go of just what was on top of her mind! "Think of all the places I could hide the jewellery, boards, chimneys, corners and jars; drawers and cupboards, all with keys!" the words rushed out. "If you tried to hide anything in that place . . . but you couldn't, it was hopeless. You hung on to everything, and then it disappeared. I lost my blanket because, in my sleep, I let go of it."

Stronger than the present, clearer than anything that was in this room, even than the face of Jan, there rose before Adele the old woman who'd taken her blanket; the gibbering yellow mask-like face with lips drawn back from the gums in a paroxysm of fever and insane triumph, her knees drawn up to her chin, the blanket clutched over them. She'd died next day, the old woman, and Adele got her blanket back, she was waiting to snatch it off the corpse, the vomit-soaked shreds that were her only covering.

"Forget it," Jan said doggedly, "the camp doesn't exist. It's a patch of blackened earth, nothing will even ever grow there again. The people who ran it are under arrest. The prisoners have gone home, like you. There's nothing left of it."

"You can't forget."

"Remember, then. But that's all it is, a memory. It won't happen again. Not to you."

"Sometimes I do forget," Adele contradicted herself. "But little things remind you, things you'd not think of, if you'd never been there. You take for granted being alone. You can shut yourself up anywhere, if you feel like it. But there, you got to

feel you'd dig a hole and bury yourself, to be alone, even for a few seconds. If you could hide anything, you'd a life of your own, a secret, something no one knew you'd got. You can't forget."

"But you're more glad, aren't you? For all the things that people like myself do take for granted? That dress, for instance . . . you'd forgotten the camp, when you were buying that?" Jan sat forward in his chair. There was a watchful look in his eyes.

Adele thought of the sales-girl in the tiny Bond Street shop, the round blank face with lips like painted petals and hair like painted silk against the solid cheeks. In those empty complacent eyes there had been no experience that could reach out to Adele's lonely situation, no compassion that could aid her to feeling other than a trembling oddity, as raw in her own eyes as though she were unclothed. Adele got the dresses, several of them. But she'd never do it again.

She replied ambiguously, "I bought three."

"Good! What else did you buy?"

"Everything. I didn't keep a thing I'd had before."

"You'll be buying a new flat next."

"Why?" He thought she sounded startled, but he was not sure. He replied, "It's one of the 'things you had before'."

"Where would I go?"

Jan thought. "Paris?" he suggested at random.

"Why Paris?"

"It's where you used to live, where you had your life, work, friends. Why not?"

Paris, Adele thought, there had been the dream, the immaterial city of youth's expectations; more than bricks and mortar, an atmosphere, a climate where you grew and were nourished as in no other place. But she was no longer young. Paris was far away. There had never been Jan, in Paris.

"Do you want me to go?" It was a foolish woman's question, but she'd said it now. It was an effort not to scream at him that to go to Paris, or any other place, would be outrageously beyond her, that she was never going away from this haven she had

found, these rooms whose very ugliness became dear to her in this moment, the solitude of them, the quietness, the bed where she lay down at night and knew exactly to what sights, what sounds she would wake.

"It's you I'm thinking of."

"You'd have more time, wouldn't you, if you didn't come to see me?"

"What a foolish thing!" Jan rose and went across to Adele, as though the movement would lend his words conviction. "It's you, here in this depressing place——"

"So you think it's ugly, too?"

"Since you ask me, I think that this room and all the things in it are about the ugliest I ever laid my eyes on."

"They must be."

"I imagine you long to get away."

"Oh, I don't know." It could be an admission, Adele knew. But after all, he couldn't make her go. She'd think of something when she was alone, some excuse to stay.

"It's all so spiritless," Jan moved away from her restlessly, castigating himself because he had wanted her to stay here, ugly as it was, in the place where he had always pictured her. "To me this room suggests someone who never looks at anything, who doesn't give a damn for anyone's trouble. A woman, I'd say, with no gratitude. Certainly, no grace. No place for you."

"You never said so."

"How should I? It was enough that you were anywhere where you felt safe and no one worried you. But I see how unsuitable it is, how dreary, and drab."

Adele looked at Jan and saw how his face had set in lines of resolve and pride. He was a gentleman, an Englishman. How hard they were to get! For an instant, she wished he were a Frenchman. But not really. A Frenchman gave his body to his bed and his heart to making money. Jan would give his heart or nothing, his kind and loving heart. Now she'd let him think she didn't need him. Hurt him, perhaps. Driven him away, certainly. Yet the words wouldn't come, that would bring him to her. It was too high, the wall of her pride.

Jan turned to the window and Adele saw him lift his head above the familiar slight squaring of his heavy shoulders. "If you'd really like to get back to Paris," she heard him say, "I'll help you." How could she answer him?

From the window, Jan saw the van in the yard. But before he thought to mention it the knock came, the brazen, shattering knock. "There's the laundry," he remarked, and turned round.

Adele had not moved. But the hand that had flown to her breast to press back the first violent convulsion of her nerves, had an inert look as though the unexpected noise had paralysed her. "That made you jump," observed Jan, "will you go, or shall I?"

Adele did not answer. Her nerves were quietening now. She continued to grow pale until Jan could see a blue shadowing round her mouth and eyes and the thin edge of the carefully blended rouge at the outer sides of her cheeks. "I'll go," he said quickly.

The laundry boy was about seventeen, sandy, downy of lip and cheek, full of consequence. He whistled soundlessly, curbing his impatience, as he waited for Jan to pay him. He wore a hill-billy shirt and on his satin tie was painted a Folies Bergère girl balancing above the rim of a champagne glass. You could buy such ties in Piccadilly; also, probably, in Whitechapel. He never once glanced at Jan and Jan guessed that, most likely, neither would he have looked at Adele. Yet Adele was afraid of him.

Adele was still waiting where Jan had left her. Her eyes, turned to his, were enormous, full of wordless explanations. "The laundry doesn't come today," she whispered, "you must have shut the door." A sob caught her as the life began to flow back. She hadn't been prepared for this; if she'd known, she would have been braced, she could have gone to the door. Another sob shook her. She was shaking and couldn't stop. Jan would know everything now.

If there had been any doubt in Jan's mind before, there was none now. Adele was his. His trust. His delight. His undoing. As he took her in his arms, he could feel her body drawing warmth and life from his. As he needed her, so did she need

him. There were wide deep corners to her mouth where, as he kissed her, he could taste the sweetness. . . . He was lost, and he knew it.

As he drove home that day, Jan knew that here was a beginning to something that he had never envisaged, had never even intended. For this adventure could no longer be the blameless, sexless thing it had been in the past. Nor was it likely to be brief. For when passion came first, love did not always follow; but when kindness was the root of love, passion remained, its origins secure. Where would their love take them, himself and Adele? What about Lorely?

Yet there could be no drawing back. As surely as the stream of traffic carried him with it down Whitehall, so was he being carried forward into the future. He would have to deal with it as it came. Already there were small landmarks. There was the Chopin concert to which he had promised to take Adele, although that was not until the spring. Something must be done about that dreadful flat; if she wished to stay there, it must be made habitable. Key-money, no doubt, would buy the tenancy. They were small rooms, that was something, and there was a spare one that he hadn't yet seen. It would be fun to throw everything out and see what could be done.

Thinking about it, it did not occur to Jan that he had any other home.

Chapter Thirteen

IT HAD BEEN A HARD WINTER, dry, with persisting easterly winds. But by early March the glass had fallen and a continuing rainfall promised an early spring.

Lorely paid little attention to the weather. If it was good, you took advantage of it. If it was bad you wrapped yourself in furs and proceeded, under an umbrella carried by somebody else, to the warmed interior of your car. Either way you won. You heard about the weather from other people, it had nothing to do

with you. Jan knew all about it, he was always out with the dog, more so than ever this winter. He came in wet, or snowy, or smelling of a cold earthy wind and tweeds. He never said where he'd been.

Lorely was not curious. It would not tell her any more about Jan, she thought, to know where he went. To her, Jan was becoming increasingly a stranger. He went farther and farther from her as the winter months passed. He lay by her side at night; he faced her across the table by day; they went out together, and their friends came to see them. But he was not there. His thoughts, she was sure, were somewhere else. She supposed they might be with the book he was writing, with which he was enclosed in his study far into the night. He said he wrote better when everyone was asleep. She always found it an effort to keep awake after eleven anyway.

It was surprising how quickly the days passed. They floated away in a pleasurable vagueness, a drift of friends and acquaintances who didn't interest her—or whom she didn't interest. Her days left no impress of any sort, so that by the next morning it was an effort to recall what you had done even the afternoon before. One thing only seemed real: and that was the new personality, growing hourly out of day-dreams and half-buried images, of the woman who would take possession of this house when it was completed. . . .

For weeks a rude hammering had disturbed the dream as workmen, instigated by Jan, had hidden away the crude secrets of the central-heating system. Log fires would have spared all that—but now it was done and, in the heaven-sent silence that fell, the dream came back.

Lorely kept seeing an altar, the purple cloth of the Passion, the glimmering flames of the Lenten candles. Lilies, too, their perfume enwrapped her; sometimes it was so strong it was like a drug charging her with sensual urges and intensities that were farther than she knew from the hallowed purple of their supposed origin. Yet there was no impulse towards any carnal expression of these erotic stirrings. The inhibitions of Lorely's childhood and of her religious upbringing kept her from

desiring anything more sinful than the suggestion, the atmosphere of dalliance. But for the trappings of her romantic adventure, she could scarcely wait. And only Jules Menier could help her with those.

It had become almost an obsession that only Jules could understand the room she most wanted, her purple room. Why Jules, she had not reasoned. But, with the advent of spring, now was the time.

"Ask him to dinner, darling," she had approached Jan, "it looks better, coming from you."

"He'll know why we asked him, anyway."

"Well, what's wrong with asking him to do the house? It's not an insult."

"Jules Menier is not an interior decorator."

"That's why I'm asking him! You are silly, it's a compliment."

"If won't be a compliment if he refuses. I've got to work with him, remember. I don't want to ask him favours."

"We're paying him."

"It's still a favour. Why can't you have that man we had before?"

"He's not Jules Menier . . ."

"That's the point. Jules is a brilliant artist, but he's not a man I'd choose for a friend."

"There! He's an artist. You've said it yourself. Of course I don't want the other man. At least you can ask Jules Menier."

Well, there it was. Jan had invited Jules and Jules, pleading a press of engagements but sounding cordial, had asked himself to tea. Nowadays, Jan always had tea with Adele. He persuaded himself that Lorely might manage better without him. Jan had not forgotten how, when they first met, Jules had tended to make fun of Lorely. But if she were going to get round him over this house, she would have to learn to look after herself. Jan could not always be there.

It had taken Lorely a week to decide what to wear. It had been a delightful week. She had hardly realised she had so many clothes. She tried on everything that was possible, she made a dozen receptions, sitting, standing, moving forward to receive

the Latin homage, the kiss on the outstretched hand on which she had tried the diamonds, the rubies, the sapphire ring and bracelet, and had discarded them all.

He would be a connoisseur of women, a criterion of elegance, of that she was sure. A succession of irreproachable gowns, all worn by other women, passed before her inner vision. Whatever strategy she devised, of line or colour or cunningly deployed ornament, he would defeat it; he would know them all. How was she to beguile those young, yet ancient, brilliant and cutting eyes? The pile grew, of the discarded robes, the relics of a score of hours such as this she planned, but none of them so portentous, or with this delicious, tingling surmise. Or so it seemed now that these dresses, with their brief histories, were done with. Then she remembered the black dress.

She had it made for her in Paris, before the war. It came from a designer whose name you never heard now. Perhaps he was dead, or a prisoner. But he had left this dress. Never once had she worn it; no occasion, it seemed, had ever matched it. Nothing had happened during the war to cause her to don this masterpiece: to damn it, perhaps, with faint pleasure.

She wore it now. It was dateless. The jetty fabric, neither silk nor wool, was cut on a line that curved like a letter 'S' across her body. The curve was limned in jet, the tiny hand-sewn bugles winking in a black torrent from shoulder to hem. You could never add anything to that wonderful embroidery. A pair of jet and crystal ear-rings, alone of jewellery swung from Lorely's ears as she sat on a low chair of eau-de-nil satin and waited for Jules to arrive. Outside, she had been told, it was raining.

Lorely recalled Jules as a force rather than as a flesh-and-blood person. He contained the magnetism of danger, as of any sleeping, violent element that induces in the spectator a masochistic longing to draw nearer, to savour peril, in safety.

She was not disappointed. All her nerves awoke with dread and excitement as he came towards her with his light cushiony tread, his head held high, youthful and assured, above the bloom of his faultless clothes where her quick eye caught the gleam of a dark satin waistcoat. She stood up, feeling fifteen, grateful

for the masterly dress which hid, she hoped, her insecurities.

She felt the touch of his lips to her hand like a shock, even though she was expecting it. Before he straightened he lifted his eyes to hers and saw in them her struggle against his power over her. He felt no doubt as to its outcome.

"Mrs. Hegen, I was hoping for this."

"We would have asked you sooner," in his absence, Lorely still clung to Jan, "but we know you're busy, always."

"Not always. Frequently, I rest." His inflexion mocked the word.

"But this isn't resting! I mean, we did think . . . we were going to ask."

"You want to talk about your house. Your husband told me. I wish all my work were as pleasant."

"And we thought, perhaps, a picture, Mr. Menier. If you could paint a picture." Lorely sat down on the marine couch. She must have the picture.

"A picture, Mrs. Hegen? Of what?" Jules sat down beside her and displayed the ornamental waistcoat.

It was a splendid waistcoat of dark navy brocade, excitingly emblazoned. Lorely resisted a longing to lean forward and peer at the pattern. This wasn't a social call. This was business.

"Of my room," she answered, "my bedroom."

"I shall have to see it, Mrs. Hegen, before I can paint it."

"But it isn't there! I mean, we thought you'd paint it, before, so that we can see how it will be, when it is there." He was making her nervous, she'd no idea now of what she was going to say to him.

"And what makes you think that I, Mrs. Hegen, am the best person to visualise your bedroom?"

"I didn't mean that." But it was plain he didn't believe her. She must make him understand that she regarded him quite properly. After all, she had to have a bedroom. There was nothing in that. She made an effort, "You see, I know what I want, but it's not everybody I can explain it to."

"What *do* you want? I promise, I'll do my best."

What did she want? Lorely clasped her hands in her lap and

shut herself up inside herself, tightly, so that she could not see his dark blazing eyes, the suspected smile under the heavy moustache, his tantalising waistcoat. Was the pattern Prince of Wales's feathers? But she must think of her room. The waistcoat would come and go. Her room would remain.

"It's purple," she began, "blue-purple, walls and carpet. I want light things against dark, white candalabra, ornaments, furniture, real candles with gold flames on the dark walls. A white bed with draped-back curtains. Lilies . . ."

"White lilies, the purple ribbon. What are you laying away? Your sins? Or your virtue?"

"I don't mean like mourning. I mean rich, the contrast, the white and gold and purple. It's dignified, flowing. Slow. People hurry so, if you know what I mean?"

"A setting for heavy dresses, slow movement? Are you a Victorian at heart?"

"Of course I'm not Victorian!"

"Forgive me. How could I tell? A woman who repudiates her own era, must have her home in another. Probably she is adjusted to a slower tempo of living, since no other Age approximates to the speed of this. In the conduct of her affairs, social, domestic, love, she would prefer, perhaps, more ritual. Ritual demands time; and time is what we lack. But you are fortunate, Mrs. Hegen. You have plenty of time."

"Oh, no! I never have any time."

"To whom, then, do you give your time?"

She thought of all her activities, the day did not have many hours from the time when you woke till the hour when you began to feel sleepy. Unwittingly, she answered him. "I don't see many people. I'm too busy."

"But you have time to recreate another Age? Time to enjoy it?"

"What Age do you mean?"

"Oh, more leisured, more preoccupied with the Arts. An Age where you might sit for years in your purple room embroidering, say, an altar cloth."

"I hate embroidery."

"Why?"

"I like to sit still."

"What do you think about?"

She tried to remember. "Colour," she suggested, vaguely. It was true, her days were coloured; she had blue days, green days, days of all colours; but she couldn't say what made them like that.

"I believe you're an impressionist, Mrs. Hegen."

"What's that?"

"Someone who sees effects rather than details. Who, possibly, prefers dreams to reality."

"I see details," she objected, "I know what I want."

"When you see it. Which means, when someone else has seen it first." Jules arched an eyebrow at Lorely and, quite unaware that he had made his point against her, she smiled back at him, her sweet uncomplicated peasant's smile, showing her broad teeth, white as an animal's.

Louie came with the tea and Jules watched Lorely as she disposed the tea-things, carefully and conscientiously, setting between them the tall stand with the covered hot dishes at the bottom, the scones and splits dusted with flour fresh from the oven, the pyramids of airy sandwiches, the unobtainable plum cake. Who told her that he enjoyed an English tea? Or was it for herself?

It was a rare thing to come across anyone so completely stupid. Most people kept a reserve of perspicacity, of cunning, which got them through. What got Lorely through? Nothing, Jules suspected, but her money; which enabled her to replace a world she did not understand with one of her own creating where she could feel at home.

Wherein lay her dissatisfactions, her inhibitions? There were no restraints in her mouth; if anything, its wide uncertain curves were a little loose. In the breadth of her head, the high deep swell of her breasts, the width of the slim hips, there was a suggestion of fecundity, of giving. She would give all, where she gave at all. That was stupid, too.

How much genuine interest had she in himself, and how much

in this purple fancy of hers? There were plenty of decorators. He accepted his cup. "What else do you dislike in this modern Age, Mrs. Hegen?"

"Besides what?"

"Besides, I think you inferred, twentieth-century speed, dress, manners?"

She searched in the cloudy ante-room that contained her sense of history and discovered there, women for whom men died, women who made history. None of them would have worked in the Red Cross. She replied obscurely, "Women don't have much chance, do they?"

"I think they have too many."

Momentarily, she understood.

"You may be right. They're too free. There's no mystery."

"Women are always mysterious. I find you mysterious, Mrs. Hegen."

"Me?" Lorely's heart flapped as she set down the tea-pot. "Why?"

"I wonder why a beautiful woman like yourself should find life disappointing? Even modern life?"

"I didn't say I was disappointed." Lorely leaned forward. She was paying great attention.

"Aren't you?"

"Disappointed with what, Mr. Menier?"

This was dreadful. It was like playing draughts with a child of four. You couldn't talk, you could only put her to bed.

"Don't let me ask your secrets. Yet."

What did he mean? She'd no secrets. There was nothing in her life that she couldn't tell anyone, if they asked. He must be interested in her. Really interested. She could say anything, and he would listen. People never listened to her.

"I wonder if you'll understand, Mr. Menier, but in my room I keep seeing swans."

"Alive?"

"Oh, no, no. But the whiteness, you know, the way the long neck curves over. I thought the furniture, you know, could be like that," she waved her hand, shapelessly, "like

swans, the bed especially, with the wings spread, at the head."

Lorely watched Jules anxiously. Had she said too much? Suppose he thought it was silly? It wasn't silly, she knew. If he thought so, she'd get someone else. But that would be so . . . so disappointing.

Jules did not think the swans silly. At least, not more silly than Lorely herself. Moreover, the allusion had touched off in his mind the idea of what Lorely was after. Like a boat, her room sailed suddenly into his vision and rocked there at anchor; purple and white, fabulous, costly, unavailing, and a little mad—like Lorely.

With the sharpness of his vision, his dark eyes had pointed so that they could almost have contained tears. Jules could weep for excitement. He had never wept for anything else.

"I could imagine you, Mrs. Hegen," he said lazily, "in the sort of room that looks from a castle on to a lake . . ."

"But the room looks on to the Mall!"

"You'll have forgotten the Mall, when I've finished with it."

"But why a lake?"

"The swans. The medieval in what you suggest. The raised drawbridge, the withdrawal from life outside. The prisoner."

"Prisoner! What do you mean?"

"If you shut the world out, you shut yourself in. But you can do so most pleasantly. You might even tempt someone to share your incarceration."

"My husband isn't very interested. He has no imagination, you know."

"About you, or your room?"

"I don't think he thinks much about his home. Jan is a writer, you know. Writers don't think about real life, do they?"

Lorely's eyes were wistful. In them Jules saw all the hurt, the puzzlement, the disappointment for which he had been searching. His hopes lifted. "But real life is much more exciting, don't you agree?"

"I think so. But Jan doesn't see it."

"I see it."

Lorely's heart flapped again. She dared not look at Jules. He was tightening a snare about her and Jan, who could be preventing it, was miles away. If he were here, this wouldn't be happening. But Jan was never here. "You have a captive air," she heard Jules's insinuating tones again, "with your pallor and large eyes, you could be pining in some fastness for a lover who never came. Though it seems unlikely."

Lorely turned the large eyes to Jules. He could have laughed, they were so full of suspicion. "I'm not waiting for anyone."

"You may not be aware of it, but you have a languishing air."

"What's that?"

"As though you'd like to look forward to something exciting. Excitement becomes you, did you know?"

"Why do you say that?"

"When we met, remember the evening? You had a languishing air then, a look of shadows and whiteness. Then we saw each other. You came to life. Life is electricity, you know. You were more than beautiful. You were electrifying."

Some deep instinct in her, beyond conscious reasoning, denied him his triumph. "That was the wine," she answered.

His eyes glowed. "You should take more of it."

"I don't drink much." It was all she could think of in reply. She would have liked to give him a provocative answer, but there wasn't one. Yet she could feel a haze of desire wreathing through her, an exciting smoke, through which it was difficult to see him clearly, only his mouth half-smiling and the hot mercurial eyes. She would have liked to see them close above hers, the laughter in them wiped away. Talking was so difficult, loving so . . . so simple. . . .

Jules had seen enough. She might be stupid; but the passion of a clever woman was a dangerous thing, particularly when she was married. Leaning back, he tucked his thumbs into the waistcoat. "I remembered you from that evening. Did you remember me?"

"Well, it's hard to say." How bold he was! Lorely would have liked to say 'no', flatly, and see what happened. But then he

wouldn't do her room. Besides, it would be a lie and she always blushed when she told lies.

"Or was this painting of your room, your husband's idea?"

"It was mine."

"So you did remember me? London, you know, is full of artists. Several of them are good. Many, I'm sure, would be only too delighted to execute your interesting commission. It's a fallacy that painters can only paint what they see. For a few hundred guineas, they will see virginity in the eyes of a Hollywood divorcée. Your room would arrive in a matter of days, six feet by four, done in deepest purple and embarrassed by swans. Why am I singled out for this honour?"

"I want my room to be the way you would see it. It wouldn't be the same with anyone else."

"It might be more soothing. You should know, Mrs. Hegen, that I am a member of the underworld. No, not a gangster. But essentially I occupy a sublunary clime where you might not feel at all at home. I am persuaded that all of us have sprung but lately from the darkness. I deal in inversions of the soul that would alarm you. Necromancer, infidel, anarchist, are my terms of reference. In short, I am a bad man. And if I interpreted your room by the atavistic symbols of my own apostasy, I fear you might not approve. You would not, I'm sure, understand."

Lorely did not understand. Jules had not expected it. But he did expect to provoke some interest, a question or two to which he had already prepared the answers. He was young enough still to be intensely interested in himself. But Lorely merely continued to stare at him with her round, charcoal-dark eyes. At length she said, "I would understand, if you told me beforehand what you planned. Then I could say if I didn't like it."

Like the mills of God, Jules thought, her mind goes on grinding, slowly. He sat up abruptly, abandoning his sophistications. "Let's move the tea, shall we?" He stood up and set the cake-stand to one side. He felt slighted. For two pins, he wouldn't go on with her room. As he came back for the trolley she said anxiously, bending forward a little to look up at him, "I'm sure we could agree, Mr. Menier, if we discussed the details? You

know those tall narrow mirrors with the gilt edges? They've twisty patterns at the top." She wiggled her fingers.

"Baroque. Yes?"

"I've seen them in rooms with those short heavy lamps held up by little black boys. I'd like a pair of those."

"Blackamoor lamps. D'you mind if I smoke?"

"Of course not." Lorely had never smoked. She had a peasant's wholesome country instinct against it. Consciously, she had never seen a woman enhanced by the fidgety motions of smoking.

Jules tapped his cigarette on the thin gold case and looked down at Lorely reflectively. He'd no desire to sit beside her again. Her damn room was all she was interested in. He'd give her a pointer or two and get out.

"What you want, Mrs. Hegen, is a room in the character of the Italian Renaissance. Explain that to any competent interior decorator and he'll do the rest."

"But I don't want any interior decorator! They're stupid people, they draw plans, with figures, you can't see what they mean till it's done."

"All building starts on a drawing-board. The most airy of castles will be no more than a castle in the air without the plans, the figures. Between your architect or decorator who is the practical dreamer, and the abstract planner like yourself, lie tracts of figures, drawings, all the materials, the hidden wires that ultimately part the curtain between the dream and the reality. Even I draw plans."

"But you're a real artist."

"No artist is real."

"They're not like you. They're modern. They don't think as we do."

Suddenly Jules understood that the shadowy room in Lorely's mind was only one half of the illusion. It was merely the setting of her imaginary drama. Jules himself was the other half. He was the drama for which, unconsciously, she longed. Possibly, he conjectured, the whole thing, the room and its furnishings, the voluptuous purple, had taken shape in the first instant that she

had set eyes on him. She was that kind of woman. She would not own to anything so commonplace as an attraction toward a man who was not her husband. It must all be wrapped up, embellished, made unreal before it could become a part of her own existence. She herself was unreal. She took no part in the world in which she lived. If he wanted her, he must play her game. But it would be interesting if she could be made to admit that she wanted him in any room, in any world, anywhere.

"Have you talked this over with anyone besides myself? My views are not the only ones."

"I don't think I could tell anyone else," Lorely broke off. A moment before he had seemed close to her, excitingly mixed up with all that was magical and desirable to her way of thinking. He promised the fulfilment of her hopes, someone who would confirm that her ideas were not the foolish things Jan always made out. Now he had grown apart from her. He was a solid, strange young man in perfect clothes, whose dark eyes were weighing her up as though she were a length of fabric whose colour he did not quite like. She had been warm. Now she felt cold and unhappy. Then a possible explanation occurred to her. "Can't you do it?" she asked kindly, "I don't want a very big picture. More a sketch, really, in colour. You needn't put in all the details. I shall get a lot of those later."

"It's not whether I can do it. It's a question of whether I'm the best person."

"I think so."

"But I don't."

"You mean . . . you won't do it?"

"I shouldn't."

"Why?"

"Would you allow me to see something of you, Mrs. Hegen, if I were not going to design your room?"

Lorely considered the matter carefully. Somebody else would be doing the room if Jules wasn't. She might be very busy. It wasn't as if Jules were really interested in her. He couldn't be, if he didn't want to do her room. They wouldn't have anything to talk about. No, she didn't want to see him. But she mustn't be

rude. After all he'd given her some ideas. She could use those. She answered, smiling politely, "My husband might not allow it, Mr. Menier."

Jules thought, you couldn't separate her from it. If she didn't get her room, he wouldn't get her. Slow as she was, she would have beaten him. He would never know her as she might be when faced with the reality of her own passion, with no shreds of illusion left to protect her from her own desires. Foolish creature, trying to hide the simplicities of her perfect body behind the cunning of her perfect dress. Poor, stupid, tiresome, desirable woman. . . .

He matched her polite smile with his own. "Will your husband allow me to design your room, do you think?"

"But you're not going to do it?"

"I've an idea, better than swans. A certain Countess of my acquaintance once took a fancy to an Italian castle. She transported the contents to a stately home in Nottinghamshire, the property of her fourth husband. The effect was atrocious. Husband number five is a Philadelphia business-man with a taste for tubular steel. I don't promise, but it might be possible to buy the Roman relics, when they come up for sale. Or certain pieces. There was, I recall, a fine Renaissance bed."

History revived in Lorely's mind, the old legend of chivalry and adventure, riding her fancy in a bright panoply of knights and ladies, the white palfreys, the pennants lying on the wind towards the distant medieval turrets. But first she must make sure that she had not dreamt it, that what Jules implied was true, that he would go to the sale and buy her the furniture he spoke of, the real thing, all the way from that romantic land. There must not be any mistake. Indeed, she would have liked it in writing.

"Will you get it for me? That bed? And the other things I need for my room?"

"If you instruct me."

"You won't change your mind? You won't let anyone else have it?"

Lorely stood up. There was the same glow in her that Jules

had seen once before, a sudden clarity in her skin, a deepening of her eyes. It was, he decided, a kind of drunkenness, induced by excitement. In this state, she would not know what she was doing, or might not care. One day, he would find out. He answered, "I can go no higher than your price."

"I will have it. At any price."

It would be hers, her beautiful room, just as she pictured it. She would sleep in a bed that had come from an Italian castle.

There was, of course, no one in it but herself.

Chapter Fourteen

AT THE ALBERT HALL the pianist was waiting for silence. He sat passively at the grand piano, the tails of his dress-suit hiding the piano-stool, one patent-shod foot resting lightly on a pedal, his arms hanging quietly at his sides. He waited and the audience waited and felt that it was quiet. Seconds passed. It was as though the audience were listening now with his ears, so that it heard with his acuity the inappreciable report of everything that was still happening in that hushed hall. It heard the little soft things that dropped, that would have to be picked up, the gloves, the programmes; the whispers, the rustlings, the uneasy ancient chair-springs; the settling into deeper and deeper calm of the last wavelet of that restive human sea.

To be able so to shatter silence! The pianist, a Pole, was a man of some beauty and no great size. But from his iron fingers there leapt with galvanising violence these glittering jets of sound, forced to the roof, and driven in a blinding steely spray over the heads of the unprepared listeners. The Chopin Polonaise in F sharp minor was not a piece to encourage inattention.

Jan allowed the bitter tempestuous notes to fall round him, but they did not reach his heart as a less abstract melody might have done. Jan preferred the warm and simple airs loved by the people. He had no interest in experience as recorded in music. To his mind, musical composition was fallible, subject to too many variations of execution and interpretation. Frequently,

music annoyed him; probably because, if he were honest, he knew so little about it.

As the first half of the concert proceeded, apart from the presence of Adele at his side, Jan derived his greatest pleasure from a contemplation of the pianist himself. . . .

He was young, probably not yet forty, the greatest living exponent of Chopin's music. His face expressed, with a curious alternation, the profound entanglements of will and mind and body from which he had extricated himself to attain this mastery; and the serenity of spirit that mastery had wrought in him. From time to time, as when he wrestled with, and vanquished some unseen difficulty, there would come into his face a kind of snarling smile, followed by a clearing of the brow of its innumerable small creases and an upward lifting of the eyes, as though the musician had thereby released a cloud of doves, or butterflies, and he watched their flight over the auditorium with wandering eyes, wide and limpid with their own sense of release. In the burnished lid of the piano his disciplined hands fluttered as softly as a pair of moths.

Down in the pit a blind woman was listening, her ears lifted to the sound as a face lifts to light. Now the audience truly listened as one, blended, unified. In the dim lighting beyond the central bluish spotlight, the hall wore the air of a Victorian music-room, ugly but loved. There were the worn red rep fauteuils, the ornate fronts of the boxes with their interlacing pastoral garlands and medallions of faded wedgewood blue. At the lighted windows of the boxes themselves, a triple tier, the wine-red curtains were looped as primly as the tresses of a Victorian maid. Many people, Jan noticed, wore red and this gave the audience a cosy air, so that it appeared warm and ordinary and unaccomplished in contrast with the chaste spotlight, the black-and-white of the performer, the icy isolation of the platform. Jan wondered who shared with him the rare altitudes of the musician's world, and what warm and human loyalties remained to him after the mastery of his Art which was no less than the mastery of himself?

The lights brightened for the interval and the pianist came

forward to meet the applause. His manner was diffident even to insignificance after so virtuoso a creation of sound. After a little while, he left the platform. His walk was straight-backed, light and springy. No matter what he did, you realised, everything was under control.

Jan turned to Adele. Throughout, he had been conscious of her, aware, a little wryly, that her appreciation of this performance must be something that he was not sharing. In a way, the thought made him jealous and unhappy; he could not bear with equanimity that any part of her, mind or listening ears, should stray for long, from his. He had been snatching little glances at her and they made him feel lonely. In the subduing of her wilful and at times turbulent expression he felt he had lost her. Where were her thoughts behind the downcast eyes, the appropriate air of repose? He could not touch her, contact her. He would break in where he was not wanted. All he could do was wait, content that to all appearances she was enjoying herself. After all, it was only because of him that she was here.

For so long this concert had been their landmark, something that they had promised themselves they would do to celebrate that Adele was completely well again. When he mentioned it, knowing her love of Chopin's music, it had seemed impossible to them both that she could ever go calmly and rationally to a concert, even with Jan, and enjoy it. But then so many things had seemed impossible that now were commonplace. From the day they admitted they loved each other Adele got better and better. To her, nothing was too much effort if it would please Jan; and in time the hum-drum activities and contacts that had previously been unthinkable, became habit and ceased to be matters for comment.

In many directions, Jan knew, Adele grew and developed and all was well. She was a stone heavier and she still ate like a hungry stray all that was delicious and out-of-season and as remote from the scavenger-bins as it was possible for food to be. Recently the conversion of the mews flat had been accomplished. Adele had taken it well, moving from room to room as the workmen took over. The locked spare room, cleared of name-

less lumber and trunks, was now a small studio. The previous owner, that fusty lady, had exhibited a business sense in compensatory measure for her lack of artistic taste, and had cleared a cool five hundred for the relics of her tenancy, complete, for which a dealer had reluctantly offered Jan seventeen pounds.

All these were material things, and they were good. But there was danger in their love. It was for Jan that Adele lived; for her that he tolerated the hours that he was apart from her. Fear stalked them, for all the many accidents of life that could divide them for an hour, or for ever. Their union, in a sense, was bondage. By it, they had lost their independence, their strength as separate individuals. What would follow if one lost the other?

Like a stone at the bottom of Jan's heart was the existence of Lorely. Did Lorely lie as cold and heavy on Adele's heart also? Or was she too uplifted by her new happiness yet to be aware of Lorely?

Adele was crying. With a shock of dismay Jan saw the fine silver tear slide over the down-bent cheek nearest to him. Her eyes were lowered; her hands had the inert look he had noticed on other occasions when something had disturbed her. She might have been reading the programme between them, but Jan knew that she was not.

"What is it, darling?" he touched her arm gently.

Another tear followed the first. She shook her head, not moving, not looking at him.

"Shall we go?" She seemed unable to move or answer him. Even in his anxiety he noticed that her dress like so many others there, was red, glowing against her fair skin and hair. He pulled up her fur coat over her shoulders and took her arm. "We'll go out for a little while." He was not seeking explanations which might promote further tears or even a break-down. If they went out quickly her upset might pass unnoticed. Many people were moving about.

Even outside in the corridor, Jan did not ask questions. If Adele was weeping, something was wrong; and if that were so, she was better at home.

They drove in silence through the wide empty streets of

Kensington and Belgravia. Once or twice Jan reached out his hand and laid it for a moment over hers as they rested in her lap. He knew that when she felt better she would tell him what was wrong. Except that he had wanted her to enjoy it, he was not sorry to leave the concert.

Even in the darkness, of all the flats in the Mews, theirs was the gayest. They could see it as soon as they turned in, its paint glinting as freshly as a spring flower, a frolic of blanched daffodils in the window-boxes, the gold lantern burning above the white front door.

More than anything, when she came to think about it, Adele had craved whiteness about her. From the front door, throughout every corner of the place, were these snowy walls and paint, not startled in any way by the quiet beige carpets. It was perhaps a clue to Adele's health that there was no strong colour anywhere, not even in the kitchen and bathroom, where a gentle primrose yellow predominated. In the living-room, a heavy gold lamp glowed on the whiteness and shone like ancient sunlight on the moss-green brocade of the curtains and easy chairs. Because there was no garden, not even a roof, nor a sprig of green anywhere in the mews, Adele had bought some roots and sprays of indoor-growing vine which were now dipping in delicate dark tendrils from their porcelain holders above the mantelpiece and on the walls. In illuminated niches to either side of the reconverted fireplace stood plaster-casts of the heads of herself and Jan, that Adele had completed.

When they came in Jan switched on the fire and pulled a chair for Adele close beside it. He poured out a drink and took it over to her. Her hands as she took the glass, were very cold. He watched her as she drank, his mind searching the evening and the recent past for anything that could have upset her, that he had said or not said, done or left undone. He could think of nothing. It must have been the music and its associations. Before the camp. Something to do with her husband? He doubted it, the man had never stirred Adele at all. He replaced the empty glass. "Tell me, darling," he said, stooping beside her, "why were you crying? What is it?"

"I don't know."

It frightened Jan sometimes to see in Adele's green eyes the same blank of trauma as he had seen there on the first day when he had come to this flat and found her lying in the wreckage of her world, mentally almost beyond recall. Jan feared Adele's past because she still, though rarely now, allowed it to overwhelm her. He, Jan, was her present. He fought the past in her mind as he would have fought an enemy, with bitterness and, sometimes, with despair. For her memories were something that, with all his love, he could never take from her. Not even for her, could he buy forgetting.

Jan raised her out of the big chair and sat in it himself. "Come and sit on my knee," he said, "perhaps you were hungry? I knew we should have had something first . . ." Anything to call her back to the homely securities of the present.

"I wasn't hungry." Her heart was sending waves of ice through her veins. She had been feeling happy, secure, until he started to play the Sonata . . . then it came back to her, how she'd tried to play it on the rosewood upright piano at home, breathing heavily over the lacy phrases of the scherzo. His fingers had scarcely touched them. She had died, that girl, and everything that had been her life at that time. You could die, in every particular, and yet still be living. No matter what you had, you could lose it. Nothing was safe. Not even Jan.

She didn't come first. With everything that he did for her, the many hours that he spent with her, the ever-present reminder of his thoughts, she was only one side of his life, and that the least-acknowledged, unofficial, unrecognised. Why, if he loved her so much, did he never speak of his home, unless she questioned him? She had no love but him. He had other loves.

If Jan had loved her less, Adele might not have felt like this. If there had been any element of cynicism in his approach, if he had not given her a heart and body so lost that they became her charge, as much her burden as her joy. His love-making was a surrender as well as a possession, just as there was possessing on her part as well as giving. In fact, she had come to wonder just how much truth there was in this so-called division of the sexes

into male and female, other than biologically, when she herself had experienced thus inextricably the emotions of lover and loved, of man and woman—and mother. After their love, she was sometimes as violated as though she had given birth, his strong depleted body heavy as a babe at her breast. Yet he never slept before she did. He was ever watchful, alert for her strength and her weakness. Because, at a word, he would have controlled his desire for so long as she wished it, she had never said that word, not once, from the beginning. She had spent herself and in return, bodily, he had given himself to her. Was it not natural that she should wish now to claim what was already hers?

She had tried not to feel like this. He was so good to her, he couldn't bear her to be unhappy. She did try to forget that other side to his life. If only she'd never gone to the concert.

"It was the music, wasn't it?" Adele felt Jan's kindly hand on her face, turning her to look at him. In the sight of his homely anxious features, she felt her thoughts to be heretical. She knew he loved her best. But if only he would say so! She answered, "I used to play some of it, at home, when I was young."

That phrase again! She was not twenty-seven now. Was she still homesick? He felt her to be still far removed from him in some secret trouble that he could not reach and therefore could not ease. "Don't think about it, darling," he tried to understand, "this is your home now."

"Not without you." She sounded a little sulky.

"How do you mean, 'not without me'? I'm here."

"Not always."

"You know I can't be."

"I don't." Adele knew she was being unreasonable. Yet only the positive affirmation of his feelings could thaw this fear that had, in secret, been creeping on her for months. The moment you had something, you were afraid you would lose it. Almost, you wanted to be free again, if only to be free of the fear.

"What don't you know?" If this was the root of her trouble, Jan must face it. He felt suddenly slightly sick. He was not prepared to talk about Lorely.

"You might leave me."

"I've no intention of that."

"If your wife found out, she might make you . . ."

"She won't find out."

So he didn't mean to tell his wife. Adele would have to share him always. But why? What did his wife mean to him, that he never spoke of her? She was tall and dark and beautiful, he had said. She had known his lips, his hands, he had looked at her with love, tenderness, desire. He had made her his wife, that dark strange woman. It was hers, the honour. Jan was hers.

Fear blinded Adele's commonsense. "Tell her," she demanded.

Jan had never yet reasoned it out. The world of Adele was the world of his love and his happiness. Home and Lorely were his duty. He never associated them. Yet he knew, and dreaded the knowledge, that he could not wholly keep them apart. He himself was the link between them. He had now no complete existence anywhere. He must now withhold from Lorely the endearments and caresses that had eased the difficult exchanges between them. Desiring Adele, he could not bring himself to touch Lorely and the estrangement between them was in the air, was beginning to settle in her face in lines of hopelessness that it pained him to see, though he himself had put them there. He was not built, he knew, for infidelity. On the other hand, between himself and Adele was this imperfection; their union of experience was incomplete, denied them by his home life. Divided within himself, he had become a man without a home.

Adele had paled. Her eyes were on his face searching for the least betrayal of his thoughts. Tell Lorely? Leave her? No, he couldn't do that. As passionately as he guarded the secret of Adele, so did he intend to leave his home and Lorely's life untouched. There was no argument in it. It was his will. Carefully he shook his head. "It's best not," he replied, "for many reasons."

He reached out his hand and would have touched her cheek, but she drew away. Her eyes were desperate. "Why?" she demanded, "why won't you tell her?"

"She's Catholic for one thing."

"You're not."

"Marriage is part of her religion."

"Catholics don't all stay together."

He was silent, wondering what it might be best for her that he should say. She read in his silence the confirmation of her fears.

"You love her! You never say so, but you do."

"It's not love, it's——" he hesitated, "—conscience, if you like."

"It's not true!" Adele felt her inappropriate situation on Jan's lap. She got down and went to sit on the edge of the chair opposite. Jan made no effort to hold her. There was a tigerish element in her when anything roused her. She would fight his hands, and regret it.

"If you didn't love her, you'd tell her. You must love her." Adele's hands were pressed together tightly in her lap. The red dress glowed like a jewel against the green chair. It needed a reminder that in this picturesque young woman there still lived the Adele whom a slammed door could terrify and who woke in the night wet with the icy sweat of terror.

"You say, if I loved her, I'd tell her. Yes, I should. And that would be an end of us. My happiness, and yours, depend on my not telling her."

"I didn't mean, tell her like that." If it was possible, Adele grew colder. "You could tell her you loved me. She wouldn't want you then. I wouldn't want a man who loved someone else."

Jan did not reply. That was like men. When you had them on a spot, they didn't answer. You could think anything. It was much worse than the cold truth.

Adele stared at Jan. How terrifying was his face in its mask of constraint! She would batter it, break it, if the mask would fall away leaving the Jan whom she knew, the lover, the beloved friend. At once, she loved him and would destroy him. There was no enemy like those whom you loved.

Into the vacuum of her helplessness there rushed, like a cold sea, all the intuitive awareness of his marriage that her fear, and also her happiness, had formerly held back. He led a double life. He was deceiving her. He gave to someone else as well as to

herself, his kindness, his gentle ways, all the consideration that would make a woman, any woman, love him. There were other people in his life, other rooms where he stood and sat and gave of his mind and his laughter to friends who were his friends and his wife's, not Adele's. Other loyalties. Other beds. . . .

Her cold Continental realism spared her no intimacy that might be his when he was away from her. A wife was a wife. A bed was a bed. And a man was a man. The nights were long. There was one thing she had to know, although all the instincts of her sex warned her against asking, and against what she would do with the knowledge when she had it. But there was no damming the break-through now. Her control was gone.

"Have you a double bed?" she asked baldly.

"After fifteen years you can't suddenly get rid of your bed." Jan thought, why did she have to ask that? Women probed so painfully. They hurt themselves as well as others. It was a kind of perversion.

"You could. You don't have to sleep with her. Not now."

Again he was silent. What else could she expect, if she said dreadful things like that? She might just as well go on, and make it worse. She'd know it all.

"I know you go to bed with her. She'd find out if you didn't. She'd have asked long ago."

"She doesn't ask."

"She doesn't have to!"

"My love is yours. I don't share it."

"You live with someone else. Eat with her, sleep with her, go out with her. That is sharing your love. You're not true to me. You're not true to yourself if you love me."

"You know I love you."

"You love her, too. More than me."

"I don't."

"You put her first."

"She came first. We can't alter it."

"Why can't you alter it? You're not faithful to her. You say you don't even make love to her. You're not her husband. Why shouldn't she know it? It's not my fault, that she didn't keep you.

Why should we suffer? I never know what you're doing——"

"You do know."

"I don't. You tell me, but I can't picture you. I've never seen your home. Or her. All your family, your friends, have never heard of me. I'm your love. We'd die without each other. You know that. We should belong. We should be proud."

The tide of her jealous anger was ebbing now, leaving the wrack of what she had said, the cold hard pebbles of her innermost thoughts, that she should have kept hidden for ever, irretrievably exposed. Oh, but he must pity her! They were of his making, those painful thoughts, as everything in her now was of his making. She pleaded wretchedly, "She doesn't love you as I do."

"She's not much else." In all the bitter business, Jan thought, only honesty was any good. He would not lie to them both. The truth must be Adele's. "She doesn't make friends."

"You said she was beautiful. She could find someone who loves her as you love me. Wouldn't it be better?"

"I don't think she would. She's not sophisticated. She thinks she is, but fundamentally she's a simply person. And old-fashioned. For her, the remedies of modern law don't exist."

"She wouldn't free you?"

"I couldn't ask her."

Adele's face, her fair, shell-shaped face, was white, shattered. It was as though Jan had taken and dashed to the ground the thing he valued most. Yet he knew it must be done. He saw now that the love between them was built upon a false foundation and must be destroyed. If a new love was to stand in its place, if her heart and understanding could achieve it, that love must rest on truth, on the realities of things as they were, inalterably. There must be no false hopes in her heart for him to break. He could give her securities, but they were not those she wished. Their love had come too late. He could not marry her. Everything but that. Whatever it cost him, he must spare her the cruelty of deception, of thinking or hoping that he would ever ask Lorely for a divorce.

Jan would have gone to Adele, held her against him, stifled her

fears with physical comfort. But the fears would still be there. It wouldn't be good enough. He forced himself to stay where he was.

"I can't fail my wife, Adele. She wouldn't know what had happened. I admit we're two separate people. We've never grown into one like some couples. But we've made our separate lives under the one roof. That roof's her shelter. She'd never find another."

"She would. She doesn't love you."

"It's not her love. It's her home."

"She could stay in it. You could let her have it."

"I couldn't let her have what goes with it. The whole thing. The protection of it."

"She'd be all right."

"Would she? We're not unknown. We've no rights, no privacy. Whatever happens to us, is news. We're thrown to the mob. Our least acquaintance would know more about us than we know about ourselves. Every shop-girl, dressmaker, hair-dresser."

"You love your wife! You wouldn't think of all that, if you didn't."

"If I loved her, I shouldn't be here. It's because I don't love her that I must do my duty."

Duty. The iron word, the contradiction in his face, of the gentle and the implacable. She couldn't look at him, she must cover her own face with her hands, shut from his sight her shame and humiliation. What did she care for duty, who had the love of Jan? Or thought she had. . . .

As from a long distance she heard his voice, changed, unlike itself, harsh and difficult to hear.

"I shouldn't have let this happen. I haven't been fair to you."

Adele looked up sharply. How pale he was! He looked his age and more. Then the sense of what he had said penetrated to her.

A trap opened in her stomach. He was apologising. He was going. She'd lost him.

"Oh, no!" she cried wildly, "it wasn't your fault! It wasn't

anyone's. You've never been unfair. You've been good."

"I shouldn't have let you love me. You're young. It's not good enough."

"I'll never love anyone else."

"I know."

"Don't you want me?"

"I didn't say that."

Adele saw the anguish in Jan's face. If he suffered too, she could bear it, she could bear anything that Jan shared. Even the situation of not being his wife. She went to him, felt herself lifted against him, the mercy of his arms. "I've got no one but you!" she cried and felt her tears break like rain.

He cradled her like a baby. "Don't let me make you cry. Darling. Please."

"You were leaving me."

"Never."

"I don't want you to do anything you don't want." Dissolving as she was in emotion, she knew that somehow she must undo the bad impression she had made, must eradicate if she could the memory of her jealous outburst.

He replied, "It's what I must do."

"I know. Sometimes I'm still like I was in that place, not human. I don't know what I say."

Adele knew she had only to refer to the camp to arouse all Jan's sympathy, his protective instincts. She wouldn't forget the shameful things she had said, she would go over them with hot cheeks in the silent nights. But he would forget if she pretended she hadn't meant them. She could get behind herself. It was useful.

"You're not well, darling," as she had expected, he was reassuring her, not blaming her. "Not quite. Not yet."

"I am, really." She knew he wouldn't believe it. Then she looked into his face, the tears still wet on her own, and made her greatest effort. "Is your wife a nice person? I think she must be, if you married her."

"She's kind-hearted," Jan responded fairly, unaware of how the kindness in his voice twisted a knife in Adele's heart.

"She hasn't enough to do. She should have had a family."

"Doesn't she want one?"

"We both did. Many years ago. I don't know if she still does. A woman may outgrow her desire to have children."

"Have you? Outgrown it?"

"I don't know, my love," Jan sighed. "It may be like a lot of things that you think you're going to have, mean to have, when you're young. Comes a time when you realise—it may be over just one of those things—that you'll never have it. You know you'll never have, perhaps, any of them. You give up. Resign, gently if you can."

Feeling Jan hold her more closely, Adele rested content. She was grateful only to hear his voice, to know that he was sharing with her his thoughts, drawing nearer after their frightening separation of a few moments back. In the months she had known him, his voice had changed subtly, losing many of its harder notes; it was richer, warmer, and was now so quiet that she could scarcely hear him. Yet she knew that he was not talking to himself but to her. There was not so much difference.

"Perhaps," Jan continued, "that is one thing we can do, if we have children. Resign more gracefully. Lay aside our hopes and see them in our children, born again. . . ."

An idea stirred in Adele, at present wild and distant. She asked, "Couldn't she have children, your wife? Was there something wrong?"

"Nothing, with either of us. Fate, that's all."

"I would like a baby . . ."

The idea was no longer wild, improbable or impossible. She and Jan could have a child. There was nothing to prevent it. There was the money, he could support her, protect them. She could give to Jan something that his wife, for all her cleverness, could never give him. She, Adele, would have for ever a part of Jan that his wife could never take away. . . .

Jan saw that Adele was in earnest. A spasm of excitement went through him as though there were already bedded in her body his seed, the true possession of herself by his self.

Against his longing, objections sprang to mind. It was

irresponsible. Unlawful. Not fair to her. But even as they occurred to him, Jan knew that the objections were already answered. The urge that swept him was irresistible: it was desire, a million-fold.

Excitement stood in both their faces, there was no hiding it. Jan sought feebly to assert the rational view, the laws of society over their primitive law.

"Do you realise? An illegitimate child? It's a responsibility."

"We'd be all right, Jan! We could look after it . . ."

"The child might blame us later. There'd be many problems. Things from which, perhaps, we couldn't protect it. . . ."

"We could! It needn't know, not for years. I could give it my name. I am——" she amended, "I was married. I'm legally 'Mrs.' I could give it Justin's name. No one would care."

"Justin's family might."

"They wouldn't know. And they're not interested. They only saw me as an extension of Justin. Justin's child would have belonged to them and not to me. But not your child! That would be mine. Ours."

"It's against the law."

"Hasn't Love its laws? Oh, darling, people do it, and it's all right! Why shouldn't we?"

"I know they do. But we don't hear what happens. We don't hear the child's side. You talk of the laws of love, my darling," Jan tried to believe in what he was saying, "neither man's law nor God's law allows us this."

But it was no use. They knew they wouldn't listen.

Adele's only true concern was the little prick of doubt that troubled her when she remembered that Justin was still alive, and that Jan did not know it. Adele had lied on impulse when she was tired, and before she had any thought that Jan might come to love her. Later, a curious reluctance to admit to Jan even that thoughtless lie, had kept her silent. Now she did not wish to disturb his equanimity by the sudden pronouncement that she had a husband, who was alive and might return to make trouble. Justin had a secure job on his father's tea plantation in Ceylon. He knew that Adele had no more love for him. Adele

was certain that he would not return. But Jan might not be so confident. Jan was afraid of scandal. Moreover, so long as Jan thought Adele was a widow, he might yet consider getting a divorce, and marrying her. After that, would be the time to produce Justin, and to attend to her own divorce.

If Adele had his baby, she thought, surely Jan would love her more? He talked of laws but Adele cared nothing for any law. Nothing could save you from what was coming to you. Not even God. But Jan had saved her. Her law, if she had one, was Jan.

Chapter Fifteen

IN MAY Jan took Adele to the country for a few days. They had spent a few week-ends together at the flat but this was the first occasion that not only the opportunity but the weather had tempted them for long from that peaceful retreat.

As the big grey Buick hummed through the Surrey lanes, the afternoon sun was high in a sky so full of cloud that it was like a summer sea, illimitable, infinitely broken. The westerly wind, urging this gossamer tide across the sun, broke another sea over the sloping fields of silver-green corn, great shadow-waves of cloud and wind and sun, continuously, rhythmically rolling.

Such light and space and air were what Jan wanted for Adele. He had thought for some time before he decided where to take her for this holiday. Considering her preferences, the quick way in which she still grew weak and overwrought, he wanted seclusion for her, comfort, peace, a place of tall trees and silent waters; yet within an hour's run of town, lest anything should disturb his careful alibi at home. He knew where to find such a place. They could take a leisurely drive, stop for tea, and be there by early evening.

It was peaceful, driving. Jan knew his car, he knew the roads. Adele, with her little air of unreality, her ability to look like the earliest and least permanent of spring flowers, was by his side, within reach of his hand, his voice, his smallest assurance of her

safety. They both liked to drive in silence. He should be, and in a way he was, content. But nothing dulled the awareness of his problems. Whenever, now, he lapsed into quietness, his mind started again on its treadmill, wearily and unrelentingly. He was wearing grooves in himself.

If there was one thing in life that Jan would have avoided, it was an entanglement between two women. It could have, in fact it had almost happened once or twice before. But each time he had held back, not only on moral grounds, but in self-defence. He had seen, way out ahead, all the painful circumstances that would enmesh a man who allowed himself to love one woman when bound, if not in love, in allegiance to another. But now it had happened.

Again and again, Jan tried to decide at which point of the story he could have drawn back, could have said 'no', and gone no farther. There didn't seem to be one. All he had intended was that Adele should get well; and that by believing in his interest, she should rebuild some of her faith in life and people generally. He never thought of her falling in love with him. She seemed past that. When he knew, it was too late to draw back.

He had since wondered whether, if he had been ruthless, with himself as well as with her, and had left her to stand on her own feet before they actually admitted their love, she would have pulled through? It could have been done. He could have hidden his love whilst continuing to look after her. Her hope of him would have died, but not her faith. He could have been stronger.

It was easy to be wise after the event. If there was any point at which you could take hold, could say 'now, this is where I stop.' But the demarcations of right and wrong were not so clear as that. Life crept up on you. It got through your defences. How or where, you could never tell, until afterwards.

There was this baby. Now was the time to think about it, before it was irrevocably conceived. But already it was decided, not by any word or action, but by the whole onward surge of their lives, his and Adele's, since they had known each other. Adele loved him. Her love and her happiness, therefore, were his charge. If she desired a child, he had no right to deny it unless

he were going to give her up, to force her into a position where she might consider someone who could marry her, give her recognition. And that was something Jan knew he could never do, any more than he could abandon Lorely to a mocking and incomprehensible world, deprived of the façade of her home and his presence there behind which, whether she knew it or not, she took refuge. He hated to make enemies. People you had hurt became your enemies—even if they didn't turn against you, you had turned against them—it was the same thing. There was no need, if you were careful and considered everyone.

Secrecy was the thing. In all his transactions concerning Adele, he would assume the name of Adele's late husband. He could build two homes and keep them forever separate if he went the right way about it. Other men did it. Jan had thought them fools. Many things were foolish, until you did them yourself.

Adele was not thinking for the moment of Jan's wife. She was tired, more than tired, drained of life itself by this fruitless effort to build in her mind pictures of Lorely, of what she was like, how she looked at Jan, what she meant to him, and he to her. Jan and Lorely's past, their honeymoon, their life together . . . Adele had let it all go. She would never know and sometimes she had the sense and the will-power to stop trying to find out, to stop thinking that she could create from her imagination and the clues that Jan let fall, any scenes even approximating to the truths of what had actually taken place. . . .

It was like relief from pain, this release from her thoughts of Jan's past. Now that she knew that even though Jan would not leave his wife, neither would he leave her, Adele had turned finally from her own past. From now on she would think only of the future. She would live for Jan. She would be happy, and then he would be happy too. She could pretend she was his wife. If they went to a new place no one would know the truth. 'My husband,' she would say, to people in the shops and places, and then she would think of Jan, of his tall body with the familiar stoop, the loose grey coat he wore, his distinguished head, the look of love and quietness that came into his eyes whenever he

saw her. Yes, she would speak of him thus, and in her mind he would be her dear, her beloved husband.

Once, Adele had a real husband. She herself had been a wife. The cherished words had meant nothing. Her wedding ring had fetched two pounds at a fourth-rate jewellers in the rue de la Tour. Precious, priceless symbols, that now no wealth could buy for her, the name, the ring, the discarded sacrament.

She would have a child. Somewhere in the Bible it said, 'they twain shall be one flesh'. Now she knew what that meant. Mating did not join you. Nor did the marriage service. But to create life joined you, visibly, and for ever.

Had they been driving over the edge of the world, she and Jan, Adele would not have cared, nor if they never came back. The benign and golden landscape unrolled before her. She was blessed with air and sun and love.

Jan and Adele were the only guests at the tiny hostelry Jan had chosen. By the time they had changed and dined, the colour was leaving the day. They stepped from the shadowy dining-room into a low-roofed passage of cool uneven tiles. At the end of it, a door stood open. They stepped outside.

Below them sloped a steep, roughly-made garden, scarcely reclaimed from the wood into which it wandered again at the foot without the pretence of any enclosure. Down in the distance, between the interlacing tops of the trees, there glimmered like a silver sky the waters of the lake.

The evening was as still as a pool. Nothing, it seemed, moved there. Yet there was life, silent, invisible, waiting perhaps until they themselves were received into the stillness before stirring again beneath the ashen waters, in the olive rushes of the sedge, and in nests hidden in bush and motionless tree. Arm-in-arm, Jan and Adele followed a timeless path beside the lake that appeared to flow by them like a silver river to an unknown sea. On the opposite bank the massed rhododendrons were violet and ritual purple.

For a time it really seemed that nothing was moving but the dry and silver sands sliding secretly under their tread between the

gnarled ropes that were the exposed roots of the mighty chestnut trees. Then, all at once, a small brown duck took off from the lakeside, breaking the becalmed surface in a wing of light. A rook winged from the elms. Close at hand, a young rabbit came from a bush and hopped away into the shadows, its bob-tail flashing; it appeared pre-occupied, even a little anxious, but not in haste or afraid.

There were sounds, too. The landscape, that had held its breath, was breathing again through the grasses and the leaves and at the water's surface, where something rose and bubbled and went away. The birds were resuming their chorale.

The air was like incense, hot and heavy and yet pure, musky with the warmth of earth and bracken, cleansed by water, sharpened by pines. It might have risen from the rites of some evening mass celebrated in this declining hour at an alfresco altar of the woods. Even the slender young needles of the pines, fired with palest green, were like candles pointing stiffly heavenwards.

Darkness was coming. Instead of falling, it seemed to be rising round them, creeping upwards like a tide under the broad-leaved trees whose tops still stood in clarity against the stainless sky. Like a flat blade, the colourless water lay between the land and the last light.

"I think we ought to turn back," Jan suggested, "this goes on for several miles."

"Aren't we far away?" Adele's tone agreed with Jan and they halted a moment before they turned. "We couldn't be farther away than we seem now. I can't believe anything exists but this place, and ourselves."

"It's old. There's a ruined altar or temple somewhere near that no one knows about. Probably the place is ringed with magic. We're cut off."

"Perhaps it's us? The magic's ours?"

"Or yours." Jan looked down at Adele as she stood beside him in her straight white coat. Her wide-set green eyes met his with the exposed expression that always caught his heart. Even now, her face had a broken look as of something once tender and

lovely that you could never wholly piece together. Yet her mouth was wide, tightly caught up at the corners, lusty with life and sweetness. Her hair, light as cobwebs, was paler even than the faintly-tanned skin of her brow. No one could be strong with hair like that. . . .

"Ours, Jan," Adele insisted. "What magic would there be if we weren't together? Wouldn't it be lonely?" She leaned against Jan's arm. "I wouldn't have been lonely once, but I would be now."

"You won't have to be."

"No." Adele believed Jan. So many words had been spoken between them during the past few weeks, words that were hard yet not bitter, explanatory words, that left no dangerous soft areas of doubt in her mind. She knew now that she would never be Jan's wife. But she knew also that, if she respected Jan's wishes, the incomprehensible strictures of his morality and his honour, she had nothing to fear. There was a different kind of peace between them now, as between two people who have kept back nothing that might mar their understanding. It had been hard but it was worth it to have achieved this silence, this closeness not only with each other but with all the things they shared, this quiet place, these hushed and greying waters, this perfect hour that she would never forget.

Like an anodyne, Adele felt the calm of these immobile waters stealing through her: it was in her veins, was her life-blood, this peace, this ultimate radiance that was hers because of Jan. She turned to look at him, at his plain irregular features averted from hers towards the lake. His expression, always serene, contained a look of tranquility so profound that she held her breath. It was, she thought, the look of a man who has received absolution and has not yet turned his face again to the world. Surely he must love her, to feel like that.

Adele hesitated to speak. Words were unsure things and in this silence there could be no error. Yet words were swimming upwards through her mind, lines long undisturbed that she had memorised years before and now wished to share. She laid her hand on Jan's arm. "Jan, this reminds me . . ." she quoted:

“*Rest beside me
For then, like light
Across lake water,
Falls my silence,
Falls the peace
That knows no stirring,
Dreamless, deep
Deeper than longing,
More still than stillness,
Deeper than sleep.’*”

Her voice fell silent. “That speaks for me, too,” Jan answered after a moment. “Have you ever thought, my love, as these lines slide effortlessly through one’s mind, of what we owe to the people who write them, to the poets who labour to understand, in order that others should understand without labour?”

“I never thought that,” Adele replied with a smile, “I thought poets liked being poets. . . .”

“I’ve no doubt they do—when it’s over. It catches you, doesn’t it, to think that someone else, possibly long before your time, has lived in the exact moment in which you’re living now? Thousands of years back, in the ancient Chinese and Indian philosophies, men and women exactly as we are today.”

“I know. People seem to think the world began with Christ.”

They turned and began to retrace their path. The silence that had bound them was giving place to the urge to talk, to discuss volubly those problems encompassing the story of the world and of their own origin. There was so much to consider, the profound laws of ethics and nature, the mysteries that had made them what they were, perpetually individual and yet demonstrably part of some unseen whole of experience. Like two people on the brink of some discovery, nearing the answer to the riddle of the universe, they shook slightly with the excitement of their quest. The momentous issues of life and love and death, that too often were obscured by the business itself of living and loving and dying, became suddenly clear, almost but not quite within the power of their understanding. Their quiet voices

rose and fell continuously all the way back, so that the long path seemed a fraction of the distance they had covered before.

So absorbed had they been by their discussion that they never noticed the final greying of sky and water. By the time they got back, it was completely dark. In the lake only the water lilies near the shore were visible, their broad leaves sticking out of the dim tide like stiff black spears.

Jan and Adele went up the steep uneven path to the back door of the inn. As they went in and were met by the warm savour of clean and simple things, by lights and near-by sounds and voices, they left behind them in the cool aromatic darkness the exaltation of their evening, their mood of trembling intellectual adventure; they came tumbling down from the planes of abstract discussion to the physical. They were hungry again, thirsty, as willing now to be solaced by earthly comforts as recently they had claimed nourishment for their souls. They ate pressed beef sandwiches and drank lager, sitting side by side at a high-backed bench in a corner of the empty dining-room. An elderly marmalade cat came and sat beside them and they fed it with tit-bits of meat. The cat's rasping purr and the ponderous ticking of the grandfather clock were the room's only sounds. Mentally and physically, for the moment, they were winded.

The water in the old-fashioned bathroom was abundant and boiling. No coaxing of London water by softeners and salts could draw from their bodies this grime, astounding to people who had bathed only that morning.

Adele arrived back first at their room. She had left Jan here ten minutes previously, smoking a cigarette and gazing abstractedly from the open window into the darkness. Now, his clothes littered the room. They fell from him, she knew, like leaves from a tree, idly, anywhere. So many times had she watched him shedding his foliage to stalk, naked, into his dressing-gown and away to the bath. Sometimes she would leave his clothes so that when he came back, after a whole season, he would make clumsy efforts to tidy them, relating nothing to anything, while she looked on and laughed and did nothing to help. Tonight, she would put them away.

There were small oak lanterns affixed to each of the walls and above the bed. Their tiny gold bulbs gave scarcely more light than candles. With its low ceiling, Adele thought, the room appeared to be pressing its occupant back into the past, into the days when a good countryman retired with a tallow at nightfall and read nothing in bed, unless it were his Bible. The inn itself was pressed into the earth with age. How many, she wondered, as she drew the dark red curtains across the open window, had slept and loved, given birth and died in this dim gold half-closed box of a room? She thought it was a faithful room, true to its simple duty, a place of bed and shelter, warmth and darkness, no more. Here were no ghosts, of betrayed love, of sudden death or fear. This atmosphere in harmony with nature was the climate of many who had been at peace here.

Adele moved about quietly, picking up, folding, putting away Jan's clothes. She turned back the counterpane from the bed, liking the dark red eiderdown, the whiteness of the sheets washed, probably, in that same purifying lake water. There was nothing more to do, all was prepared, made ready. . . .

At the back of Adele's mind, something seemed to stand still, a thought that had been running hither and thither, evasively, so long as she had something to do. It was because of this thought that she could not get calmly into bed to wait for Jan, who could linger like Sheba at his bathing.

She would have a baby. She was in no doubt about it, she was sure she was well again, and it was what she intended. Between now and tomorrow, she would cease to be herself, empty and singular as she had been from birth. She would contain life, contain Jan. She and Jan would grow together, within her body. She would be two people.

Justin had wanted a baby. Then she had thought with dismay of the finality of it, the inescapable duty that might tie her for life to Justin and Justin's family. Through his child, they would own her. She might never get away. Her life would be blighted before she had tried her power over it, had proved other delights, other hands than Justin's that were heavy and earnest. Try as she might, she could never remember why she had married him,

although she knew that at one time she had wanted to. But it was her aversion to bearing his child that had informed her, irremediably, that she did not love Justin.

When you loved a man, you wanted his child. You were glad to join yourself to him, to see your image and his image, joined in a third. It was permanent; even if the new life died, the fact was permanent, that you had conceived and given birth.

Women had this power to make men theirs. It was comparable to the force you felt when the clay was under your hands, the design was true, and you had only to give everything you had to shaping the form you had willed. You could do it. You could force life to your will. . . .

Somehow Adele must make Jan hers. Her need was so urgent it was like prayer, coalescing her like a flame. She could not be without Jan, who had found her, renewed her, given her a reason for living. She could not lose him. The thought alone went through her like a tempest whose full force would scatter her completely.

She would not lose him. Here was the way. Some day she would sit at peace, seeing her child, or children, growing round her, and know that only death could take Jan from her. Perhaps by then, after all, Jan would have left his wife. She, Adele, would mean so much more to him: the mother of his child.

The tension that had locked Adele, relaxed. Standing there beside the bed she felt herself slacken, as though the child were already in her arms and there flowed over them both the gold of Jan's love and approval.

Adele was facing the door. Jan seemed to come in so quickly, she knew she could not hide from him the radiance of her thoughts. As he closed the door and locked it, she felt suddenly bridal, new and disturbed and unprepared. For this was reality, beside which all other loving was but compromise.

The moment Jan saw Adele standing so unnaturally at the far side of the bed he knew, intuitively, that her thoughts were on the same subject as his own. To love was one thing. To make life was another. Long years of disappointment in his marriage had

dulled Jan's recognition of the decisions that modern knowledge, in the place of nature, now passed on to the individual. Now, man himself proposed or disposed, where formerly the matter had been left comfortably, if at times disastrously, to fate. It was therefore with a disturbing sense of power that Jan entered the small, close, cosy yet unknown room where Adele was waiting for him. He was shaping life, wilfully, to an unknown conclusion: for how it would all end, there was no foreseeing.

There was a shyness in Adele's eyes that Jan had never before seen there. He went to her. "Not in bed?" he asked, "you'll catch cold."

"After that bath? The whole lake, boiled."

"All the more so. What were you doing, darling?"

"Thinking."

"Of what?" But Jan knew. He knew why Adele looked at him now as though he were someone whom she did not know. In the deepest sense of the word, she was ungiven. No man would take from her what he would take tonight: her submission to the yoke of pregnancy, with its ultimate deliverance in pain. For whatever came, she had been willing. . . .

At the thought of her possible suffering, his heart sharpened. She saw the quickening in his eyes, grey and grave, and knew that his thoughts shared already the pain that might be hers. Her pain would be her joy and her privilege. For where a man gave physical hurt, he knew it, and was sorry. But if a woman's feelings were hurt, a man considered it was her own fault. Defloration and childbirth, they were the two torments that a woman could suffer for a man and he would honour her for them: the only two for all else that she suffered, of mental hurt, in silence and shame. . . .

Adele felt Jan's lips quiver as he kissed her and she thought, even through her happiness and desire, that this sharing of pain was the sweetest of lovers' pleasures. There was ecstasy in such suffering, of a primitive origining, long-buried, probably best forgotten.

After months of desperate loving, they were by now physically attuned to each other. Yet they had not come to that state where

desire was appetite. They were still two people striving to know more of each other, demanding of their interlocking bodies some knowledge of each other as yet unrevealed. Through the mounting waves of sensation they yet steered a single course, each of them, brain alert and heart unsubmerged, hoping for and yet never attaining some commingling that would be final. 'Now,' they thought, and again, 'now . . .' But when delight smashed them, the back-wash dragged them farther than ever apart. And so they clung together, momentarily lost as a single spar in a sea that was wider than they knew; while all the time disappointment cooled their blood and the cold mind informed them that this was not all, that not even this mating could make them one who were denied the commingling of all the other of their lives' experiences. They wanted perfection, completion, but it was not here in this bed, but in the sharing of all the years that were lost, and in the years to come that were forbidden.

They would not have it so. Adele turned in Jan's arms, urging herself against him, seeking the assurance of his warm gratified body. She lifted her arm across him towards the pillow and felt his breath warm upon her hand. She murmured, "We'll be closer now."

"Yes, my love."

"It'll make a difference?"

"Yes."

"Something we've never done before, not quite the same? Have we? . . ."

"No, my love."

"I've never loved like this. Have you?"

"No. No, my love."

"You won't give my love, will you, to anyone else? After this?"

Jan turned his head away from Adele's hand and then back to it lest she should be sensitive to the gesture. How, at this time, could he answer such questions? She wanted him to betray his past, to argue that nothing had gone before the thing that had happened tonight. Such questions were unanswerable. She wanted him to keep away from Lorely in the future. That was

unanswerable, too. How could he give her what was not his to give, his past, his future? Why must she ask him? He would give her everything, if he could. But he couldn't.

"Darling," there was the slight sharpness of alarm in her whisper, "you won't, will you? Love anyone else?"

"No, darling." Even as he spoke, Jan's heart forsook him. He should have answered differently. But how could he? His lips to her hand, he repeated, "No."

Her small soft body was no weight in his arms. With unequivocal clarity Jan knew that in his passion he had betrayed Adele. His love was not his own to give her, wholly. The knowledge lay heavily on his mind. Tightening his arms round her, he thought that Adele would not know. He alone would bear the burden of his betrayal. He was her shelter. At whatever cost, he would be that.

In the tightening of Jan's arms, Adele read her answer. He was hers. She possessed him entirely. This passion was something that he could never transfer to another. As a lover, his wife had lost him finally. Adele was sure of that as she was sure that Lorely must deserve to lose Jan. All wives who couldn't keep their husbands, deserved to lose them.

The little chill of defeat ebbed away. To be defeated was a freezing thing. To be unable to prevail, to meet with a will stronger than your own; these were the most real of life's terrors. Because of them, you dared not love until you were assured you could not lose. It would be terrifying to love something that was not yours entirely. But now Adele knew that Jan was hers. She had triumphed.

Even yet, she craved her victory, to hear the sounds of it, sweet on her ears. She had to ask, "Why do you love me, Jan?"

"I asked for you," he answered drowsily, "out of a million millions."

As he answered, there came again to Jan the memory of the baby rabbit that had died when he was young, the little soft furry weak thing that he had wanted to live. Jan was sure that there was some link between that rabbit and his love for Adele. In the darkness, he smiled. Not even in your most abandoned

moments could you compare the woman you loved with a rabbit.

Later, in that small dark unknown room they slept, deeply and dreamlessly.

Only once did Jan awake. He was sure that he had not been dreaming. Yet there stood in front of his eyes, as clearly as from a recent dream, the memory of something that he had seen during the fighting in Italy, three years previously. There was the hot, steep mountain path, twisting narrowly upwards through dense vegetation. He was alone on the path. Running down over the seamy grey volcanic rock was a thick rivulet of blood, welling from some unseen source behind the bushes. It was like some tiny tributary of a mountain stream, this blood, plashing heedlessly downwards; the life-blood of one, from the mainstream of many.

In all his experiences of the war, Jan had never forgotten this tiny anonymous river. But why, here and now, in this darkness, he should remember this one incident that set him apart from Adele or Lorely, or from anyone that he knew, there was no explaining. Indeed, it set him apart from anyone in the world, since no one had seen it but himself. In this, he was alone.

Before he had time to wonder, Jan turned over and again, instantly, he slept.

PART TWO

Chapter Sixteen

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned".

Lorely was conscious of everything that was comfortless in the confessional, every detail, every sound, within and without, that was earthly and distracting and that she wished to forget. Her knees slipped on the shiny hassock, the rim of the ledge was hard against her wrists, and there was a slight stickiness in the palms of her ungloved hands. The evening was hot and there were stuffy smells of wood and polish and of dust in the close-drawn curtain. Outside, people were moving about, she could hear their footsteps on the marble, and the distant intoning of vespers. Behind the grille, from which the slide had just been drawn, she felt the movement of the priest as a faint vibration of the house of wood that divided and enclosed them. In the semi-darkness she opened her eyes widely and longed for the light of grace that would blind her to everything but that highest altar before which, in her hot and miserable sinfulness, she was kneeling.

A little cool seemed to come with the words of the priest's blessing. Pushing back all other thoughts, Lorely began the *confiteor*.

"I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my own grievous fault."

It was but two weeks since her last confession. But in these two weeks Lorely knew that, for the first time in her life, she had drawn near the danger of voluntarily committing mortal sin. In mortal sin, her soul would be corrupt, past redemption, except by the grace of her own confession and contrition, and God's pardon, through the priest. If she died in mortal sin, unshriven, she would go to hell. She was afraid.

There were other sins, venial, not serious, oft-times repeated

and as often repented. They were regrettable but not grievous. She need not confess them, but she would feel better if she did. She began with these

"I accuse myself of being lazy. I was late for Mass last Sunday, Father. We were out very late. I overslept. I knew I should get up, but I went to sleep again."

"That's no excuse. If being out late makes it hard for you to get up, well, you should stay at home." The ascetic voice, though quiet, was compellingly clear.

"Yes, Father. I'm sorry. I will try. And I've been extravagant, Father. I spent a hundred-and-fifty pounds on a new dress, against my husband's wishes."

"Did your spending of this amount deprive your husband of anything? Was it money that was needed for the home?"

"No, Father. We have plenty. But it was vanity, Father. I wanted to be the best-dressed woman there. And there was another reason. A man, not my husband. I wanted to attract him. That was why I bought the dress. Father, he attracts me. When I'm with him I'm confused, I don't know what I will do. He tempts me. Father, I'm afraid of myself."

"Must you meet this man?"

"He's an artist, Father, a designer who is working on our home."

"Must you employ him, if he attracts you? Can you engage another?"

"Father, I couldn't do that. My husband's paid him. Besides, there's no one else who could do the work. It's all started, my room's half-finished, the workmen are in. My husband's seen the drawings. I couldn't explain why I wanted someone else."

"Do you see this man alone?"

"Yes, Father. My husband's out all day. I have to see him, there's so much to discuss."

"You should not be alone with him. Is there a friend who could be with you, or a servant?"

Lorely's thoughts flashed back. What would Jules say if she brought in a friend, or Louie, to one of their afternoon sessions? One thing, he'd soon have them out. She wouldn't get away

with that. He'd know what it was about and that she was afraid of him, of his dominant vitality, the glint of laughter that threw nearly everything she said into disfavour. You couldn't chaperon Jules. But the priest was waiting. . . .

"He would object, Father, if someone was there. He's temperamental, difficult. Artists are, my husband's the same. He might say he couldn't finish it. And my husband wants it finished."

"Let someone else finish it."

"They couldn't, Father. He's buying the furniture next month, privately. No one else knows about it. It's nearly ready, Father, except for the furniture. No one else could get that. And you couldn't put anything else in."

Lorely re-lived the past months, the hammering, the re-building, the great pillars and arches going up in her room, the purple damask that she had chosen, that would soon be arriving—miles of it, it seemed. They were going to take out the door or the window. That was for the bed. Her bed. She mustn't think of it; the thought wasn't sinful, but neither was it suitable.

"Has this man made advances to you?"

"Yes, Father. He kissed me. . . ."

The weakness of that kiss. The dizzy unfamiliar loosening of all her bonds, with Jan, with God, with all she had been taught. But she was sorry. Her contrition was well-nigh unbearable, removing her by infinities from that weak, hot, perilous state to this place of safety where she knelt to receive God's pardon, to be received again into friendship with Him.

The confessional no longer seemed stuffy, but cool as the cathedral itself, a place of refuge from the world. She would never let Jules kiss her again. . . .

Lorely concluded her confession and awaited the instructions of her confessor, and his absolution. She heard the clear resolute voice adjuring her.

"You must try to get a grip on your feelings towards this man. Keep at a distance from him. Do everything that will make it difficult for him to make advances towards you."

"Yes, Father. I will."

THE ENEMY

Lorely had not thought of that. She could move the sofa in the drawing-room, they didn't have to sit so closely. She'd bring up the arm-chairs, stand away from him when they were talking in her room, which was still empty. Yes, she could do that.

"For your penance," the priest's voice continued, "say three Hail Mary's. If you are tempted, say the *Memorare*."

"I will, Father."

Bowing her head, Lorely received absolution and repeated silently the 'Act of Contrition'. She was forgiven. The darkness of her sin was past. There was grace in her heart again, and light and calm. In this moment, all things seemed possible to her if she continued to dwell with God. She was no longer afraid of Jules.

Before the high altar, Lorely said her penance. Then she walked softly to a distant corner of the cathedral to the altar before the statue of Our Lady. Uttering a silent prayer for her intention to be strong on the occasions of temptation, she lighted a candle. The heat from the lines of frail and trembling flames wafted into her face, their beneficent radiance lingered about the hem of the Virgin's robes, while from the shadows the tender face gazed downwards, remote yet forever compassionate of the sorrows and temptations of the world. Here was someone to Whom Lorely could talk, to Whom she could unburden the perplexities and difficulties of her days, and Who would forgive and understand where understanding failed even Lorely herself.

Alone in the dusky candle-lit silence, Lorely knelt and felt herself to be at one with all that great and suffering womanhood who had bowed before this Presence. Outwardly, she was assured that her special pale make-up and the Spanish mantilla of black lace that covered her hair, paid visible tribute to the solemnity of her state. At the front of the few brief rows of chairs, her knees easing themselves on the most comfortable hassock she could find, she began to pray, the words rushing through her mind in a silent spate, tumbled and confused and yet a deliverance to her overburdened heart.

'Mother Mary,' she thought, 'he's a bad man. And he's strong. He'd do anything, lie, steal, wicked things, I know he would. I

wouldn't have a chance. Oh, make me strong! I don't love him. Holy Mother, I don't know what it is, when he's there, I want him near me, but when he's gone, I'm glad. I don't want him back. Help me to be strong, when he's there. The stuff for the wall's such a beautiful colour. . . . I mustn't think of that. Jules found it, and the cover for the bed, it's three hundred years old, I haven't seen it yet. If only I could think of my room and not Jules. Help me not to think of him, Blessed Mary. He's so clever, my room will be perfect, I know. Why must he try to kiss me. We're paying him, aren't we? A thousand pounds. Financial blackmail, Jan said. Why must he try to kiss me? What does he want?

What did Jules want? Would he dare, in her own home, in Jan's house? He was always inviting her to go to his flat. She'd never go, you could talk business anywhere. But nowhere was safe from Jules.

'It's myself,' she thought, 'I'm weak. It's been such a long time. . . . Blessed Mary, Jan doesn't love me now. He never comes near. The last time was . . . it was before the funeral, the week-end he came down to Cluer, in that hot weather. That's a year ago this month. And then, I asked about it. He didn't want me, he was only being kind. I was ashamed. Holy Mother, I don't want Jules, that's wrong, wicked. But I'm alone.

'Jules loves me, no, it isn't that. He thinks I'm beautiful, that I know how to dress. He'd make love to me if I gave him even a chance. But I won't. It's not love. He laughs at me, I don't know why. It's in his eyes. Jan never laughs. Jules's eyes are dark, bad. He'd laugh while he loved me. Holy Mary, I mustn't think of it! Help me. . . . Sometimes I want him, I don't care what he is, I could forget. It's not pure. I'm married, I'd break my vows.

'When I get my room, it'll be over. I needn't see him again. I'll tell him, I'll go away. It won't be long now. "Say the *Memorare*," the priest said.'

Lorely opened her prayer-book and turned the pages until she found the prayer.

"Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary," she whispered,

"that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee I come, before thee I stand sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy clemency, hear and grant them. Amen."

Still Lorely was not comforted. She could be strong, she could pray, there was her room, her beautiful room. It was her talisman for the future, her room where somehow, magically, all would be transformed, made different, not only her surroundings but her own personality. Jan would see her differently. But something would still be wrong.

They'd been unhappy in the basement rooms. It was depressing to have the whole house on top of you. But there was a door in her new room, it lead to that other, smaller room that would be Jan's. It was the only thing in which he'd taken any interest, the selection of the pine panelling, of the plain uninteresting furniture that men liked. He only needed a dressing-room, it didn't have to be another bedroom. When it was done, Lorely knew, Jan would go into that room and close the door. . . .

Was there nothing that might bring him back? There was one thing, but she'd tried it.

He'd been home for lunch and they were having their coffee in the drawing-room. He had on the new grey suit that she'd let him keep his own coupons to buy. She'd given him a navy silk tie and he was wearing that. She herself was wearing the primrose tie-silk in which, for no reason, she always felt younger, almost girlish. He was turning over some records and, although his back was turned, she felt him to be in a relaxed and happy mood.

"Jan," she'd asked him, almost casually, "when are we going to adopt a child?"

He had said nothing then, had not turned to her. And yet she had the impression that he almost dropped the record he was holding. At once, the confidence went from her. She felt, as usual, that she was pleading for something that ought to be hers, she was getting humble, nervous, and couldn't help herself.

She dared not go to him. She sat down a long way off, watching him. "We keep waiting, darling. But I'm thirty-five. It'll never happen naturally, we know that. The war's over now. We'll be very old parents, won't we?"

Jan's face, when she saw it, was changed, absolutely unknown to her. Her thoughts rushed at it, blindly, seeking some admission to his feelings

"Do you still mind, darling? After all, it wasn't my fault."

"Of course not."

"We'd love it, when we'd got it. When it was here, growing up with us. The house is so big. And there's Cluer. Why should it all go to Everett's children?"

"Do you want someone else's child?"

"He'd be ours. He'd go to your school. You said that yourself, remember, before the war? He'd make an interest—wouldn't he?"

"For you?"

"For us. We never do things together like we used to. It . . . might make a difference."

"We're all right. We're set in our ways. You always seem to be busy. And I know I am."

"But not together. Jan, he'd be our son."

"He could never be that."

It could be truthful, what Jan had said. He might have truly meant that he couldn't love another man's child. Lorely didn't think he would deliberately remind her of the child they'd never had. That was something they'd grieved over together; you couldn't alter that. Once he had lain beside her, holding her in his arms, talking in his kind voice of their trouble, of life and God and of many matters that she couldn't properly understand yet knew were right, because Jan said so. Now, whatever he meant, his words hurt so much, she couldn't go on. She let him put on his record. And she'd never worn the yellow dress again.

The candles before the altar were dwindling. Like hope, you knew they were dying, though you did not see them die. Only the statue was unchanging, painted in fading tender colours, remotely smiling. That, and the compassionate heart of the

woman in whose likeness it was made, who once on earth had loved and sorrowed, as all women.

Forgetful of all other things, Lorely lifted head and hands towards the statue.

"Holy Mother," she prayed, "give me back my husband."

Chapter Seventeen

THE WAITING-ROOM OF CHARLES WALTER'S OFFICE off Piccadilly showed signs of wear and tear. With an air of indifference it exhibited a brown leather settee and arm-chairs of a kind seen sometimes in the surgeries of overworked doctors; with springs so depressed by hours of patient waiting that they had retreated almost to the floor, leaving deep shiny basins in the leather. On the walls were yellowed play-bills with out-of-date successes, nonchalantly displayed, as though Charles had produced nothing of moment since those early hits. A long table was littered with theatrical and trade papers on which stood a tired-looking telephone, its cord tangled and snarled by all the visitors who had made up for lost time by making their calls at Charles's expense.

Jan had an appointment with Charles at ten-thirty. He was there by ten-fifteen determined that any overlapping should be, if possible, to his advantage. But the waiting-room, when he arrived, was not empty. Standing at the window looking into the narrow canyon of the street, was Jules.

There were reasons why Jan had no wish to come face to face alone with Jules. Although he had never stopped to disentangle these reasons, the obvious thing was that he disliked Jules. There was between them an antipathy similar to that between Jan and his father: the clash of those who treat life as a game to be played, where possible, without rules, with those who try to play it straight. But with his father there had been ameliorating loyalties of blood and association that reason could not weaken. Jan had never actually disliked his father. But as he went to meet Jules he found himself disliking him intensely, in every particular, from the cut of his suit to the suggestion of lawless laughter in

the strong dark eyes in which Jan seemed to see reflected, disquietingly, Lorely's own eyes, snared and uncomprehending. Damn the man, why couldn't he pick a woman better matched with himself?

Outwardly, there was nothing for it but the civilised pleasantries. They stood by the window and spoke with detachment of the weather, which was normal for early October; of their health, which couldn't be better; and of Charles, his unpunctuality, his inaccessability and, perversely, his ubiquity wherever things were going wrong.

By ten-thirty, Charles had still not arrived and his secretary, who was jolly and not very young, looked in to say that as he had not telephoned she expected him at any moment. Jan could hardly depart without giving Charles a few minutes' grace. Jules, whose appointment had been for ten o'clock, looked at his watch, hesitated, and then said that he also would wait. For no identifiable reason, Jan felt that Jules had something personal to say and was taking this opportunity. That being the case, he thought, he would disagree. It would be a pleasure.

"Distracting, isn't it, to have a non-stop dress-rehearsal in your own home? Like living on the stage? I fear I'm to blame." Jules sounded entirely unconcerned.

"It would be if I were there. I rather keep away."

"Waiting for curtain-up?"

"It's a long time."

"Women take their time," Jules shrugged. "Hurry them, and they merely take the longest possible time."

"That seems to be the case."

"Your wife's ideas tend to be elaborate."

"I thought they were yours?"

"Please! The purple extravagance was your wife's creation entirely."

"Extravagance is the word." Jan's tone was dry. He regarded Jules's detachment with suspicion. Jan had watched Lorely dressing when Jules was coming. You didn't order a new wardrobe for a man who was coming to measure the floor-space.

"I agree." Jules sounded nonchalant. "A decorator and building contractor between them could have done it as well."

Jan thought, 'And charged me less.' Aloud, he remarked, "Did you say so to my wife?"

"I did. But as a creative artist, your wife is not inspired by builders and decorators."

Jan preferred to ignore the inference of Jules's words and the airy, almost insolent, aplomb with which he spoke. Instead he asked bluntly, "When's it going to be finished?"

"I'd say, in a couple of months. The hold-up's on the furniture. When that's in, peace will fall. If we can get it in."

"When's the sale?"

"November twenty-two. But the room itself will be ready before then."

"We shan't need to take up so much of your time."

"Oh, I'm well organised. Your wife was showing me the first-floor reception rooms. You know, you could do something there. More in your line, perhaps."

"I haven't thought about that." Now Jan saw what was coming, and set himself to oppose it. "Lorely wanted to experiment and, of course, we were both glad to get out of the basement to sleep, anyway. But as for the rest, we've no plans."

Jules sat down on the dented arm of one of the chairs. To Jan, there was something deliberate in the informal movement as though Jules wished to minimise the importance of what they were discussing. He extracted a cigarette from his gold case and lighted it, taking time over that also. It was a nice bit of stage business, Jan thought, and mentally braced himself to miss nothing of what might follow.

Through a cloud of smoke, Jules looked directly at Jan and his eyes were bright as with some secret amusement. "I admire that drawing-room," he remarked, "I've never seen another quite like it, in a private house. You could make it the finest in town."

"I suppose I could." There was no hurry.

"But it would be equally easy to spoil it. Keep it formal, yes.

But give it something more than Regency treatment, the conventional approach."

"Such as that of builders and decorators?"

"Most certainly. Attack it with *panache*, and you'll have something for people to talk about."

"I don't care to be talked about."

"But we are. It's worth remembering."

"I'm indifferent." Jan had never been more alert.

"Still, you can't stick a chair in and leave it. Why not take the opportunity?"

"What opportunity?"

"To let me do it." Lack of confidence had never troubled Jules. "Of course, I'm over-committed. But I think I could fit it in."

"Take you some time, wouldn't it?"

"You don't seem in ~~any~~ hurry."

"I'm not. In any case, I couldn't think about it before the spring."

The laughter went out of Jules's eyes. "By the spring," he said easily, after a moment, "if we've a thought to spare from the show, we'll be fortunate. But I could get out a few sketches between now and January."

Jan shook his head. "It's a big job . . ."

"It needs a big man." A smile parted Jules's lips but it did not apologise for the conceit. He was the biggest designer of his day and, as a fact, he could afford to say so.

"When the show's on'll be time enough," Jan replied firmly.

"You could be in it by then. Have a first-night house-warming."

"If these permits don't ease, I'll spend the first night in gaol. It's no thanks to anyone that I'm not there now."

Jan thought, 'You'd like that, wouldn't you?' and smiled pleasantly. Then, Jules would be able to sketch as much as he pleased, when he wasn't in bed with Lorely. Well, it wasn't going to be made so easy. As soon as this room was done, there'd be no more tea-parties in Jan's house. From Jules's attitude, Jan had a hunch that Lorely was holding out. Jan also

had an idea that it was the room that Lorely was after, not the man, although she might not realise it herself. The trouble was, that the man was after Lorely.

It wasn't that Jan cared particularly, or thought he cared, whether Lorely had a lover. But he did care that it should be Jules, who would use and break and then laugh at her. Someone else was going to do the laughing here.

Jules got off the arm of his chair and went to look out of the window. Jan watched the broad back and glossy confident head and wondered from which direction would come Jules's new attack.

Jules turned. "I don't know if I should tell you, but I promised your wife that I'd design the rest of the house."

"When was this?"

"A week ago. Ten days."

"My wife never mentioned it."

"There seem to be a number of things that you and your wife don't mention."

Jan felt as though someone had hit him in the solar plexus, and he wondered if the colour had left his face. He countered, "Such as?"

Jules saw that he had hit on an unexpected weakness in Jan. But as he himself was bluffing, he was not prepared to call Jan's bluff. He shrugged. "Your private life's your own. I'm not intruding."

"Exactly what do you mean?"

"What I say. I don't interest myself in the *affaire d'honneur* of marriage. That's all."

"You surprise me."

"Not at all. I regard marriage as a duel. Duels aren't fought without seconds. I dislike being shot at. I enjoy being a second."

Still Jan could not determine from Jules's manner whether he had stumbled upon any information concerning Adele. For that reason, Jan knew that he had to keep his head for all that he would have liked to blaze out, to turn on Jules with the old-fashioned horse-whip for daring to insinuate that he could not only sleep with Jan's wife but that Jan, whatever the

state of his marriage, would condone and encourage it. Jules was making Jan feel elderly and Victorian and exceedingly angry.

"So you regard yourself as second to the wounded party of my marriage?"

"You take me seriously," Jules thought it tactical to retreat. "I merely generalise in saying that I've no opinion of the confidences of husbands and wives. They lack . . ."

"Not always."

"Always." With sudden surprise and interest, Jan saw in Jules's eyes a glow of fervent, if cynical, conviction.

"Nature's basis is imperfection," Jules continued. "We're all corrupt, or potentially so. Only honesty makes us even likeable. And for honesty, what do you get? A lot of clap, pious assumptions of loyalty, purity, trust, the claim to perfection in a set-up where perfection's impossible. Everybody keeps back something. And thereby hangs the tale."

Jan felt Jules's eyes upon him, narrowed and speculative. Suddenly he wished devoutly to disprove Jules, to be able to establish beyond confutation that the relationships he disparaged were possible, that you could live in harmony and trust with the right person. Jan thought of Adele, how perfect could be their love, if it were allowed. But it was not allowed, and therefore was not perfect. There was, Jan considered swiftly, a saying that to the pure all things were pure. How Jules would laugh if, as his argument, Jan advanced that saying! Was there not, possibly, something rotten in Jan's affairs if he could not construe them for fear of the laughter of Jules?

It was, Jan thought, all the more reason why the *affaire* must never come to light. Equally with looking after Lorely, Jan must guard his motives and Adele's from the prying inaccuracies of public speculation. Keep all three of them out of that storm of mud.

"If I'm keeping back anything," Jan stated impassively, "it's that my wife and I have not yet made up our minds about the rest of the house."

"The house is your wife's, isn't it?"

"But my wife, you might remember, is mine."

Jan had known Jules for a number of years and had witnessed his rise from a brilliant youngster to his present eminence. From time to time they had worked together, amicably enough, albeit with a certain constraint. Jan realised now that Jules had always regarded him as a bit of a dullard, at least where his personal affairs were concerned. Jan saw also that Jules was now, rather tardily, revising his estimate. There was a pause. Then, lifting his head, Jules replied brightly, "You misunderstand me. You know there are certain jobs one likes to do, and others one wouldn't take on for a fortune. I'd like to do your house. I'd consider it an honour. I've no motive beyond my artistic enthusiasm."

Jan thought that in its expression of complete frankness, Jules's face was brazen. He was about to say so, or words to that effect, when he heard the door open.

At once it seemed that there was a different atmosphere in the room, as though in these drab utilitarian surroundings someone had drawn a cork and a party had begun. The new arrival was Sari.

Jan and Jules might have been the handsomest men anywhere, the finalists in some contest to adjudge all the most desirable male attributes, between whom there could be no distinction. Jan himself could not help responding to Sari's greetings, aware in a general way of an impeccable turn-out, black and scarlet and white, of immaculate ankles and feet in scarlet shoes and a hat which on anyone else he would have condemned unquestioningly, but which rested on Sari's glittering head like the laurels of love themselves, scarlet and unashamed. Sari was pleased with life, with herself, with everyone. Her gaiety was as stimulating as her perfume, and all of it was genuine.

Jules, particularly, was thankful for the diversion. Moreover, in Sari he visualised an ally in his impending *débâcle* before Jan. He moved in swiftly to claim the advantage, answering Sari's question as to what they could be discussing, two men who before long would be combining their brains, their mutual brilliant talents, in devising a show of which she would do her

best, her humble utmost, to be worthy. Sari was at her gayest, not believing a word of it nor expecting to be believed, her smile the prettiest in a continent, the diamonds at her ears, wrist, and collar moving in points of light like shooting stars.

"Now, Sari, we were not discussing women," Jules smiled blandly, his eyes paying her dark compliments, "not even your delectable self. We were not discussing horses either. We were speaking of something that has neither two legs nor four, that is obedient, constant and, even when totally unadorned, very, very beautiful."

"But who is this rival? It is a riddle—what is it, a conundrum?" Laughing at herself, Sari mispronounced the final syllable with a bang.

"It's a house, Sari," Jules replied, "an empty, perfect house."

"It's yours? You've bought it?"

Jules waved a hand in Jan's direction, gracefully and regretfully passing on the honour. "Jan's. His fortunate inheritance, a house in the grand manner, regal, irreproachable from every angle. The original of the best stage and film sets, the missing curve of the grand staircase, the ballroom in its entirety with a ceiling by Adam and a musician's gallery like a bird-cage in gold, straight from the *Tales from the Vienna Woods* . . ."

"And Jules is going to design it! Oh, Jan, when will it be finished? I will come to see it, from Paris, New York—anywhere!"

Jan met Jules's eyes, where the laughter was sparking again. It was a bold bid, but Jan wasn't calling. In this game, Sari was a card that Jan also could play. . . .

Jan smiled at Sari, liking everything about her and making sure that she knew it. "Jules," he commented, "has more important considerations than my house. . . ."

"But, no! If you make a show, it may be wonderful, magnificent—but it's not for ever! In a year, two years, if we run for five years, in the end we are all broken up. They take us to pieces. But not your house! It stays for always, for people to say, 'Jules did this.' What could be more important than that? Jules—" Sari turned to him, one arm theatrically outstretched, "—what?"

"I agree." Jan thought that Jules's tone was perfect, incalculable. He might have been merely humouring Sari, or in complete earnest.

Sari turned back to Jan. She was enjoying herself, settling this misunderstanding of the lovely, neglected house. "Jan," she insisted, "you must *ask* him to do it!"

"And what do you do, my dear," Jan replied imperturbably, "when people say 'no' to you?"

"You think anyone says 'no' to me?"

"I imagine life itself says 'no' sometimes, even to you."

"Ah, life! That is different. Then, if I can, I laugh. If not, I go away—to think."

"Good advice. You see, the people who've always worked on my houses, have never given me cause to say 'no' to them. So I won't be giving Jules the opportunity to say 'no' to me."

Now Sari grasped that, for some reason, Jan did not wish Jules to design his house. But to take sides might make difficulties for the future. Warily, beneath the gaiety, and with the pretence at a pout she demurred, "I'm sure Jules wouldn't."

"Still, we won't give him the agony of deciding."

Jan did not look at Jules as he spoke. The matter of the house was now closed. He would ring the firm as soon as he got back. Lorely would still find plenty to amuse her, but her considerations would no longer include Jules. That they would most probably not include Jan either, was another useful point. As for Jules now, he could bite on his rage. In common with the rest of his world, it would give him something to keep back.

Sari sailed into the cross-winds of antagonism, bent on dispersing them, smiling her brightest. "And when it's done," she demanded of Jan, "you'll give a party, in the new house? With the musicians in the gallery, like the Court balls of the Emperors? And ask me?"

"The party will be for you."

"Oh, when will it be? I'll put nothing in my diary till I know the day! I'll buy a new diary."

"Not on my account, I hope."

Sari and Jan and Jules all turned at the new voice. The door

opened widely upon Charles, rubicund, well-tailored, unrepentant. If Charles had suffered remorse on account of his appointments book, he would have found an early grave.

"I'm most sorry!" he declared, coming forward, his smile flashing genially from perfect dentures, "most extremely sorry to have kept you waiting like this! Believe me, I'd no hand in it, no hand at all! Saril!" he embraced her, "you're incomparable! Jan! Jules!" Charles grasped their hands, each of his in one of theirs, "forgive me, all of you, please! I'll say it now, I've got to leave you."

Chapter Eighteen

ADELE HAD NOTHING TO DO. Jan had called her to say that most probably he would not be able to get to the flat this afternoon. It was something to do with the show he was writing, or going to write, and with the people he worked with who at one moment were decided, as though it were their last will and testament, that they were going to do this, that, or the other; and who at the next were going to do something altogether different. It was bewildering, and it was disturbing, because Adele foresaw now the ending, for the time being, of her settled routine with its hours of peace and happiness that she and Jan had so carefully established and preserved. She would see Jan, yes, and probably as often. But it would not be the same. Knowing exactly when she would see him, gave Adele a sense of direction, as though their hours together were her signposts to the future. Deprived of them, she felt lost, stationary; and she grew afraid.

For the same reason she had remained in this flat. Jan would have bought her a house, moved her out into the country, surrounded her with servants, nursemaids for the coming child. But here, Adele felt safer. Here, Jan was only half a mile away. He could reach her in ten minutes. Everything, here and in the little streets immediately outside, reminded her of him and none of those memories was other than happy. Every landmark was safely in its place.

The afternoon was warm for late October, but grey and heavy with oppressive cloud. Adele wandered vaguely through the flat, opening all the windows more widely. She, too, felt heavy and grey and the strong movements of the life within her, recently quickened, irritated her because it seemed that the child possessed more energy than she did herself.

Within the tiny room that had once been her studio, she paused. She kept it clean, indeed, everything in the flat was lovingly groomed and cared-for because Adele would have no other hands than hers at work in the home that was Jan's. But where there had once been an urgent creative disorder, the easel, her sketches, the unfinished models, her box of damp red clay open on the floor—there was now an unfamiliar order. This room was like the lodging of an artist who had now gone away, leaving the work-table bare, the easel folded against the wall, a lid on the box of clay, and the models ranged neatly on shelves, their stages of incompletion preserved behind damp brown sacking.

It was so true, Adele thought, she had gone away from this room, and from all that it stood for in her own nature. She was with Jan now. The baby was Jan's, and was also part of herself, so that she therefore had no creative life apart from Jan. There was nothing she wished to create but Jan's child. 'I wonder if I'll ever work again?' she thought, 'perhaps when the baby's born, I'll model it. Jan would like that. But I couldn't do anything now. I'm too happy.'

Adele marvelled at the apparent change in herself. Once she had been a young woman who would have crushed anything that opposed her in her determination to master herself, her materials, her art, to create, what? What, after all, was there so desirable in the representation of forms of life that everyone, if they looked, could see for themselves in their truth and actuality? What was the creative will that made you an artist?

Was it merely the will to make something? Everybody, nearly, had that. Perhaps it did not so much matter what you made, so long as you had something to show for having lived at all? Some people chose harder subjects than others, probably

because their wills were stronger. It did not mean that their effort was greater, or their achievement, whether you made a baby or a statue, or even if you made both! It was all relative to the individual. In this discovery, for Adele, there was humility.

Would the change in her become permanent? Where now was her will to do anything except dust and cook for Jan? From a forceful individual, she had become a girl—for surely she was younger; like a million others, a housewife in a smock, duster in hand, without ambition, gravid and content. Did it matter how, or why, or for how long?

Feeling happier, Adele closed the door of the studio and went into the front room. There she switched on the radio. At once, the slow introductory notes of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasia* took the silence, prisoned and held it. Adele thought that they were like perfume, these powerful phrases, rich and sensuous, cloying and yet compelling. Like a bee deep in the heart of the honeysuckle, she was momentarily engulfed, enslaved, drugged and dreaming. Even when it was over and the silence was released, she felt still bound by the music's latent spell. These days, she was so expanded by her love that she was sensible to the slightest stimulus. Colour, music, even the movement of leaves or draperies, enlivened her. She was living fully, every experience feeding the hungry drama of her own life.

A tiny wind blew through the flat, as at the opening of a door. Adele turned swiftly, her eyes suddenly full like a brook in spate. But it was not Jan. Merely, probably, the little stirring of a storm-wind. Nothing stirred now without waking Jan in her mind. In the cavernous darkness of her past, he burned like an army of candles that a breath could stir or that a strong wind might extinguish completely. Without Jan, she would be in darkness.

But Jan was with her; even in his absence, Adele felt that he was near.

The flat was peopled now with little things that they had bought together, mementoes, curios, some of them valuable, some merely captivating. Among these, attached to the walls, were three shallow bowls of pottery. Adele loved these bowls.

She stood now where the light gathered within one of the gentle curves and gazed into it with a vague yet intense appreciation of the potter's art. The bowl itself was lapis lazuli blue, and within its hollow lay a rosy flower, its petals tipped with sunlight, folded in pale celadon leaves. The flower lay there as though it still lived, as if the fire had sealed for ever its soft and brilliant colours. Beneath the glaze the edges of the rose petals, in bas-relief, crinkled gently and beyond them the background wreathed like sea-green smoke about to flower into other new and ardent shapes. You could never tire of looking at it, at the artistry, the alchemy of it all.

After a while, Adele went over to the window. The sky was so grey, so low, it seemed almost to touch the house-tops. There was a bird on the window-ledge. Adele and the bird knew one another. "Bird," she addressed it, "bird . . ." The starling stood on his stilt-like legs and splayed his feet and threw out his bosom. A pulse beat in his throat. He cocked first one bright eye at Adele's, and then the other. Then, unimpressed, he hopped on to the window-box and looked the other way. His tail-feathers dipped behind him like the tails of a dress-suit under which, like an after-dinner speaker, he might have tucked his hands. He strutted a few steps, pompously. Then, abruptly, he winged away as though he had suddenly remembered a meeting at his club.

Adele watched the bird disappear. Then, down below at the corner of the mews, she saw the bonnet of the grey car.

It seemed that the dull afternoon burst into colour, into bands and sunlight and a movement of leaves.

She heard Jan's steps on the stairs and turned towards the opening door. "I thought you weren't coming!" The words broke from her.

"So did I! But they called it off."

Jan set down in a corner of the couch his usual enormous basket, filled and heavy. He took Adele in his arms and kissed her. They might have been separated for months.

"I'm so glad!" she cried, "so relieved."

"Relieved? What about?"

"I don't know. I'm glad you've come."

"Why, my love? Aren't you so well?"

"Oh, I'm well. But the time seems long. When you think about it, it's short, too. How many hours will we have, Jan, together, do you think?"

"Thousands and thousands."

"But so many apart."

"Not one. I never forget you, not for one moment. We're never apart."

Now that her loneliness was over, Adele was not afraid to think about it. It became even pleasurable, something to weigh against her present joy and find the latter heavy-laden. Yet she wanted Jan to share the sadness that was past. Why should she bear that alone?

She leaned her head against him as she did when anything troubled her. "It's dark, isn't it? Are we going to have a storm?"

As Adele knew he would be, Jan was at once disturbed. He lifted her chin, studying her expression anxiously. Her face was now definitely plumper, her skin lightened with the indefinable clarity that sometimes comes with pregnancy. Her eyes, green as a cat's, met his with a look that in itself was feline, desirous, yet watchful and detached. The detachment, Jan thought, hid some secret upset from the knowledge of which she wished to spare him. He had to know what it was.

"You're not so well," he accused her, "tell me. How do you feel?"

"Strange. I do, sometimes. It doesn't mean a thing . . ."

"How, strange? Is anything on your mind?"

"Ah, my mind! It's all a dream. I think I am a little mad."

"Darling, please."

"It's the weather," she pretended.

"It's not. How did you sleep? A nightmare? You sounded all right this morning."

"I don't only have nightmares at night."

"You never said this before. Come, darling. Tell me what's worrying you?"

Obediently, Adele sat on the settee where Jan placed her.

His reaction was as satisfying as any she had hoped for. It was true, wasn't it, she had strange thoughts, visions, when he was away from her? Why should she hide them? She was glad that, even when she thought Jan was not coming, she had tried on this dress; the pale green silk, narrowly pleated, both smock and skirt, opened and closed with her movements like a delicate fan. Even the upstanding collar, like a fine ruff, was pleated. In it, she felt confident, graceful yet invalided, sheltering a figure that had not yet thickened as much as the dress implied. It was the first time Jan had seen her in a smock.

"It's nothing, Jan," she assured him smoothly, "my mind's all full of phantoms, heights and depths and flames and deep water," she qualified, "it's love."

"You mean, in a happy sense?"

"I don't know. I feel I want to do something tremendous, leap from a height, or plunge to a depth, into green dark water, like our lake. Or be with you."

"You don't really feel like that? As though you'd do something silly?"

"Not when you're here."

"When I'm not?"

Adele was not serious. But it excited her to see Jan's anxiety, wiping his expression clean of all preoccupations that did not concern herself. Like this, Jan's face was to her the dearest thing on earth, plain yet illumined, strong in all its qualities yet tender, all for her. If she could but keep it so!

Blinding herself to the verities of her recent happy thoughts, Adele delved deeper, seeking other states of mind, half-true, that she knew would hold Jan's fears for her.

"I don't know," she answered him in tones deceptively distressed. "Sometimes it seems that I'm so full of—I don't know what it is, as though life was so big, so much bigger than I knew, it's too much for me. It's like passion, all the time, desperate! I can't get rid of it. Only with you."

Underlying the new womanly softness of Adele's features, Jan was conscious again of the violence of her emotions. He had observed this violence before, and more clearly in the unclothed

structure of her face when he first knew her; before his love and his care had endowed her with this soft flesh, this rose of health and gentle prettiness, that were all the more disturbing because he saw now that, in the fundamentals of her nature, she was unchanging. Even now, she was a danger to herself. The unbalance of her nature, he thought, was like the seam of ore that you knew was hidden in the rock. But this was base ore; a seam which, if smitten, would cleave the rock asunder. He must keep Adele away from it, away from these violating and dangerous thoughts.

He took her hand. "My darling," he pleaded, "you're not yourself. I wish you'd someone with you. Someone like Nanny."

A month or two ago, Adele herself had responded to Jan's anxiety as to her being alone at this time by suggesting that Nanny should come to her. Then, Jan had appeared evasive, unwilling to send for Nanny, or to say why he was unwilling. Now, Adele wondered if she could uncover his reasons.

"Would Nanny come, do you think?" she answered amenably.

"I said, 'like Nanny.' Not necessarily Nanny herself."

"Why not? She brought you up. You loved her, you said so. Don't you want her to bring up your child? Or help to?"

"She's not young. And she's very deaf."

"She'd be company," Adele persisted perversely, "and we could talk about you. I'd love that. I'd make her hear."

"I doubt if you could." Jan's expression was worried, pre-occupied. "No, she's not suitable. You need someone younger to stay with you afterwards. I wish you'd agree. I don't like your being alone."

"I'd rather have Nanny. Older people are kinder. You know where you are with them. And I'd hear about you when you were little. It'd be better than a snapshot album. . . ."

Jan shook his head. "It wouldn't do."

"Oh, why not? Jan, I want her."

Adele thought, but she was not sure, that there was a look in Jan's face as though he were secretly ashamed. "Ask Nanny,"

she urged, "see what she says. If she feels she's too old, she'll say so."

"I'd rather not."

"You're afraid!" Adele saw it plainly, "you think she'll tell your family."

"No one's to be trusted. Darling, let me decide this. I know what's best."

"Best for you," she rushed in bitterly. "You're not thinking of me or the baby. You're afraid the secret will come out."

"It's all one. You and the baby and, as you choose to call it, the secret. Our secret, yours and mine. Ours alone."

"I believe you're ashamed of it. Ashamed even of your old nurse knowing. Ashamed of me!"

"My love, you don't mean that?" Jan had paled as he always did when she upset him. "I adore you, honour you. Both of you."

"It's such a little thing," she cried wilfully, "you won't do a thing for me!"

"Anything but this," he answered steadily. "Perhaps I see it more clearly than you do. We should be bringing into our intimate life someone who could destroy it at a word. We should be on hot bricks."

"It's because you're afraid to tell her. You don't dare. Why? Jan—why?"

He met her eyes and she saw in them a sadness that made her afraid because she knew that it belonged to something that was stronger, older, than his love for her. "You may be right," he admitted. "To me, Nanny was my mother. She made my laws and, in my eyes, they were just. Perhaps I don't care to have to account to her for the laws I've made for myself. I want to look after them in my own way. As I look after you."

"Do you?" Adele would not admit to herself that she believed Jan. She wanted him to go on, forcing her to believe, saying the things she wanted to hear.

But his attitude changed disappointingly. "My love . . ." Jan leaned forward and gently kissed Adele's averted cheek. She did not look up or respond. He continued, "We've said it

all before and you agreed. You're upset, not yourself. I know you don't mean it. Darling, you're not well. Please let me get someone to keep you company, you can choose whom you like. I'll get a list from an agency."

"I don't want anyone." With dismay, Jan saw that Adele's green eyes had gone blank. "I wanted Nanny, because she was part of you. No one else."

Now that Adele had found out why Jan would not have Nanny she reverted to her original wish to be alone. She liked being alone. If someone were with her Jan would not worry so much: and she wanted him to worry. There was justice in it since she worried all the time he was away from her.

"Haven't you enough of me already?" Jan was trying to turn her thoughts, to make her smile. How did he think she could smile, against this welling, cold despair? "Soon," she heard him add, "you'll be saying too much. Tell me, darling, how are you? You haven't told me since . . . since yesterday. . . ."

"I'm all right," she answered surlily. If she wasn't it was his fault, not hers.

He sought to please her, to place her in a happier frame of mind. He took both her hands, turning her to face him. "You may be getting used to this baby," he said persuasively, "but I'm not. I go on getting excited. I can't get used to it."

"There's no change from yesterday." Her tones were dull.

"There should be. Every minute."

Releasing Adele's hands, Jan laid his own gently on her body. He thought, but could not be certain that something stirred under them, and he felt his heart quicken with excitement. This separate existence of his own body, in its blending of mystery and earthy actuality, continued to stir him profoundly. He would have liked to X-ray the whole process, though he realised that even then the true nature of it would remain unknown: for there could be no X-ray of the soul. As it was, Adele could never tell him enough. "Can you feel it moving?" he asked her.

"Sometimes."

"Does it hurt?"

"Not yet."

"It's not going to, we'll see to that. Or rather, science will."

"How can you be sure?" At last, Adele lifted her eyes to Jan's and he saw in them an expression that caused his thoughts to speed backwards, casting over the months to an occasion when he had seen just this same beaten look, expressing a despair that was wilful and yet genuine. It must have been a long time ago, he thought, struggling with his memories. Then, in his mind's eye, he saw her: drawing back from him on the divan on the first day he came to this flat; and professing that nothing, past, present, or future, interested her. It was alarming to be reminded that Adele could ever again be like that, or that the hungry features of those days were not lost but merely out of sight; those, and the old damaging, uncaring attitude. Then it was because life had been too much for her and, temporarily, had beaten her. But what could have upset her now?

"Darling," he said sharply, "don't look like that!"

"Like what?"

"That expression. It's how you used to look before . . . before I knew you."

"It's not long ago. Two years. I can't be so much changed."

"You *are* changed. You're well and beautiful and I love you. You're going to stay like it. You'll have the baby."

"I could lose you. Or the baby. Or die. Why not?"

"But you won't. The specialist thinks you're fine. And you know I love you. Why do you say these things?"

"You can't be sure of anything." Having yielded to pessimism, Adele was now swamped with inconsolable misgivings. Unconsciously, she started to speak truthfully, her fingers twisting and tightening in her lap. Jan became her confidante, no longer her antagonist but the only person to whom she could tell her fears. She was not pretending now.

"When I was small," she began, "I always knew that something would happen to me. I used to envy the other children because they were safe and I wasn't. When I was in prison, and then in the camp I thought I knew what it was I'd been afraid of. But it wasn't anything to do with them, because I'm still afraid, I get a feeling—I'm doomed."

"Nothing will happen to you, my love, while I'm here." Jan stilled the thin restive fingers. "And I've provided for you, though you don't mean that. When the baby's born, I'll be with you, or near. That's a promise."

"It's not the birth."

"Is it—me?"

Adele was silent.

Jan knew Adele's trouble. Helpless before her, he knew that it was because Adele loved him and could not claim him, that there was no certainty in her life. She needed tangibilities, strong and visible bonds to hold her fast against all that had been, and still was, insecure to her way of thinking. These securities, that she needed most, were what he must deny her. Humbly, and with an effort, he tried to comfort her. "My love," he said, lifting his head to look at her, "I give you my love, my whole heart. Is that not enough?"

Once more, she was silent. It was not enough.

Chapter Nineteen

"THIS HAS BEEN A MOST PLEASANT POSSESSION—the key to your door. I part with it reluctantly."

The key was large and ordinary. Jules held it up before Lorely's eyes, tantalisingly, as they stood in the broad white and gold corridor outside the door of her new room.

"Oh, hurry! Hurry, and open it!" To Lorely, this was no time for dallying. At last she was to see her room. She was ready, everything was ready. How could Jules bear to wait? But then, he had been seeing it all the time. He had not her sense of mystery, dignity, that bade her withdraw while beautiful things were in the process of creation: rooms, dresses, people, you should not see them before they were ready for you. She reached impatiently for the key. "Let me open it!" she cried. But Jules held the key away from her. She had never seen his dark eyes so bright. You would think that he, too, was excited.

"In the past few days I have even considered displaying

this," he remarked, poisoning the key between a leisurely finger and thumb, "on a small stand supported perhaps by a swan. Or on a cushion—of purple. My room contained nothing so interesting as this key."

Now Lorely saw what Jules was about. "You are teasing me," she reproached him, "you know that it's hard for me to wait. After all this time."

"My dear Lady Cluer," Jules stooped towards the key-hole, "tell me one thing that is not enhanced by anticipation?"

The door swung inwards. But the secrets within were not at once revealed. At an angle across this corner of the room had been erected a curved white Florentine arch at present filled by a curtain of purple velvet. Stepping on to the white carpet, Lorely saw that there had thus been formed a tiny ante-room to the main chamber. Jules pressed a gilt arrow-tip in the arch's moulding, and the curtains parted. . . .

Lorely went right in, across the snow-white softness of the carpet, up to the edge of the tapestry square at the room's centre. She would not walk on that, she would look at it; now, she would look at everything. . . .

Jules remained near the arch. Because he knew every detail of the room, his interest lay now in observing Lorely. She was standing motionlessly, half-turned away from him towards the window, her hands clasped loosely before her. Her figure, slender of back and deep-bosomed, carried proudly a clinging, flowing robe of Madonna blue. This garment, in colour chaste and intense, belonged in the room as no other could have done; it was borrowed from the saints, from all that imagery, mystical yet worldly, from which Lorely herself derived. In appearance, at this moment, Lorely was a figure from a legend, a fable told by herself, its sources unknown and therefore unproven. Was she saint or voluptuary? Jules pondered. Or neither?

Then Lorely moved, slowly turning, the folds of the blue gown regrouping round her, as she gathered to her sight the new treasures of her house. Jules caught sight of her eyes, and he felt his own contract with an unfamiliar emotion. It was not love, for he thought he could never love a woman; it was

perhaps nearer to the pity you could feel for a child to whom life was still beauty and certain glory, and the disillusion was yet to come.

To a child, or to Lorely, Jules could understand that this room would be overwhelming. To Jules, it was itself exactly like Lorely, beautiful yet confused, occasionally inspired and yet at fault. Lorely, he knew, would see only the beauty and the inspiration, believing them to be her own.

The purple of the walls, mounted in panels of silk damask with mouldings of pine, was not so overpowering as he had anticipated, but rather was darkly regal, lustrous in depth and texture. At the two high windows, relieving the purple, there were rich drapes of snowy velvet, braided and tasselled in gold. To either side of the windows were tall gilt *torchères* bearing antique lanterns on slender stands, delicately wrought. Between the windows stood an immense cheval glass, its frame elaborately carved and gilded, branched with gilt candelabra holding long white candles.

There were candles everywhere, some of them real, others to be lighted by artifice. There was too much whiteness and gilt and glitter for the room to appear dark. Lorely had said that the room must be dark; but Jules knew that she intended merely a midnight purple that would frame the pyrotechnics of life as it might be lived in an Italian castle. No castle in Italy, however, had ever looked like this.

Two-thirds of the third wall bore a panel of mirror-squares, diagonally draped in great swags of the white velvet, braided in gold and silver and weighted by massive gold and silver tassels. These drapes, if Lorely pleased, could be released to cover the glittering mirror. But she would hardly wish to loose them now while the bright glass held the flames of the log fire leaping in the fireplace opposite. . . .

It was all here, everything that Lorely had wished for. There was even a table of inlaid Italian marble whose base was a pair of swans carved in wood and which supported a billowing china swan filled with tuber lilies. It was all in the mirror at this moment, the flames, the lilies; the purple, the purple, the swan, and Lorely

herself, the folds of the burning blue gown standing round her like the carven robes of some statue.

Then there was the bed. Alone in all this magnificence it rested, almost lightly, on a raised dais in the corner at the back of the room opposite the Florentine entrance. It was so much frailer than she expected, its carving flowing downwards and outwards like gilt lace from the narrow gilt corona at its head. From the corona there parted a mist of draperies disclosing an Italian panel of cherubs and angels painted on the bed-head in tones of greys and pinks, flame and cerulean blue. Across the bed, like a sacramental canopy, there lay a coverlet of gold tissue, pale and gleaming, embroidered with threads of metal and deeper gold, and fringed with silver. From a distance the cover was like sunlight itself, traced with shadows and declensions of sunlight. The whole piece, bed and draperies, resembled of itself a fairy's coronet set down upon the ermine whiteness amid the encompassing purple of State. Indeed, it was more than a bed. It was history.

Like a woman in a trance, Lorely went towards the bed. She mounted the dais and went close to the bed and lifted a corner of the glimmering coverlet. She could scarcely see it. There seemed to be a haze over her eyes, filming everything that she saw with a kind of shimmering excitement. Never, never in the world, had she expected to possess anything like this room!

She let fall the edge of the coverlet and turned. Jules had come to the foot of the dais. The mist before her eyes parted slightly and she saw that Jules himself was not without a sense of occasion. With his dark suit, he was wearing a yellow brocade waistcoat. Lorely thought he looked like a courtier with his elegant easy bearing and powerful dark face. For an instant, she was not sure which was the more exciting, Jules himself, or this room he had given her.

"Well?" Jules asked her. His eyes were amused.

"And it's real!" she breathed, "all of it, all real."

"All of it? Not quite." Jules pursed his lips, looking wary.

"But it came from the castle! You said it did."

"Four things: the bed, the tapestry, that panel," Jules indicated

an embossed leather panel hanging above the fireplace, "and the marble." The Italian marble, the bust of a woman, stood on a pedestal in a corner between the great mirror and the window. Jules's eyes lingered upon it and there was desire in them.

"Is that all?" Lorely's tone was flat with disappointment. It must all be perfect. Surely, nothing here was not perfect?

"My dear, not even your wealth could purchase the entire contents of even one room of a medieval Italian castle. Having plundered the art of centuries, you would not only be bankrupt, but you might not even like what you'd bought. This room would be filled with objects of incomprehensible value, cracked, mended, dulling, dying. Five hundred years is a long time. Chestnut wood, for instance, acquires a peppery odour." Jules wrinkled his nose. "It wouldn't go with the lilies."

Lorely looked down at Jules with misgiving. She was not sure that he meant what he was saying. But there had been one thing that was probably true. "Would it cost as much as that?" she asked him, "to buy it all?"

"A king's ransom," Jules assured her. "And that without any of this furniture." Jules half-turned and Lorely saw past him to the fireplace, to the long couch and tall-backed chairs, carved and gilded and upholstered in white velvet. They couldn't be nicer.

"Made specially," Jules continued, "not for a medieval but for a living lady. Don't you like them?"

"Oh, I do! Indeed I do! Please don't think me ungrateful." Lorely came to the edge of the dais. How dreadful, if Jules should think her dissatisfied, when he had done so much. And he was right, she wasn't made of money. Jan had grumbled that ten thousand was a lot to spend on one room. What did it matter? When his show was running, he'd make that in a week, and more. They weren't ruined any more than they were all going to prison because of the permits. Still, it was enough.

Jules held out his hands. "Come and look at the tapestry," he invited her.

His hands, Lorely remembered, were small and strong, dry and warm. Once she touched them she wouldn't want to let go. But she couldn't very well refuse.

He would not release her. He drew her close by the prisoned hands so that she could feel the magnetic warmth of his body, see closely the clear brown of his skin and the dark and sleeping line of his mouth under the heavy deceptive moustache. She thought that he might kiss her and she waited, her heart beating heavily. Who could blame her if he did?

Looking into Lorely's bewildered features, the white purity of her skin, the glowing eyes, the heavy gleaming hair, Jules paused. Her mouth was wide and gentle and uncertain. All he wanted was to part it, to impose upon her the certainties of their mutual desire. Why, then, did he hesitate?

In her stupidity her face was child-like, both touching and obstructive in its simplicity. Her skin was almost entirely devoid of those lines that were the writing in a face. You could read nothing there but perplexity, and an indefinable sorrow.

It amazed Jules that, after all these months, he still did not understand Lorely; that the mind of a stupid woman should be beyond him. But it was so. Even yet, he could make a mistake.

He released her hands and drew back slightly, though not far. It would have been easier to understand him, Lorely thought, if he had stepped closer to her.

"If you've any questions," he remarked, "ask me now, while you've the chance."

"Chance?" she queried. "Are you going away?"

"I am not. But at this moment I'm a walking inventory of everything that's here. I remember each thing you asked for, and the way you looked when you asked for it. I can tell you which are here, and which are not, and why. But in the course of time, if I've not been seeing you, my memory may prove faulty."

She objected, "But you can see me."

"Can I?"

"If your memory's bad."

"I would much prefer to keep it green."

Lorely tried to read the meaning in Jules's eyes. "You mean——?" But she couldn't go on. She had no idea what he meant. What did he want her to remind him about? Couldn't he make a list?

"I mean, that I hope this is not the last room that will concern you and me. . . ."

She answered immediately and honestly, "Oh, I can't do another! I can't afford it."

"Money is not my only concern. And there are other rooms already in existence."

"You mean, you work sometimes—for nothing?"

"My dear, nobody does anything for nothing. Everyone has a motive. When you decided to set a stage for yourself, with a back-cloth of purple and the embroidery of make-believe—candles, lilies, swans—you had a motive," Jules expressed it even more simply, "I mean, a reason."

"Oh? And what was that?" Lorely was not sure if she understood, but he was talking about herself and it sounded interesting.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Please do," she answered politely. After all, if she couldn't make it out, she could change the subject. He had been going to tell her about the tapestry. That would be safe. She knew about needlework.

Jules drew a breath and looked at Lorely reflectively. He was minded to tell her exactly what he thought. People never recognised the truth about themselves. He turned away from her and walked towards the tapestry carpet, talking as he went, apparently to himself, and waving his hands in emphasis. Lorely trailed after him, watching and listening, anxiously and a little cautiously.

"When you inherited this room, Lady Cluer," Jules began, deliberately, "you were a woman of enviable beauty and wealth. You had a successful, titled husband, exuberant health, and—shall we say?—relative youth. Yet you were not content, or even happy. Why? Shall we work it out?"

"Happiness," Jules enumerated, "can be inhibited by one, or all of three factors—money, work, love. I retain that order, though I stand to be corrected. Let us examine all three as they affect yourself. You had money, but only yourself to spend it on—there's an end, even in oneself. Work—" Jules broke off with

a wicked oblique glance at Lorely's bemused, suspicious, listening face—"anyway, you had nothing to work for. Love." He broke off again, considered, and made his decision. "There must have lain the failure, the absent drama."

Lorely thought that it was like trying to do a sum in your head to follow what Jules was saying. If it were written down you could go back to the beginning. But, in all this, where was the beginning?

"So you set a stage, in a mood of fanatical romanticism." Jules was warming to his theme, "Declamatory in style and yet constrained, sybaritic yet ascetic. Hypocritical. The obvious setting, as I see it, for conflict between the flesh and the devil." Having got it clear in his own mind, Jules turned swiftly to Lorely. "Do you follow me?"

It was like being asked an unexpected question in class. "Oh," she ascribed at a loss. "No."

"I am suggesting, Lady Cluer, that you are torn between lawful and unlawful desires."

"What's that got to do with my room?"

"Because this room is the expression of yourself, of your desires and your inhibitions."

"Oh."

"In other words, it serves you as a playground, a sort of half-way house between heaven and hell." Watching Lorely closely, Jules's mouth twisted ironically. He did not care whether or not she understood, there were other routes than words, to her understanding.

"I'm not going to hell," she objected, superstitiously.

"You disappoint me," Jules remarked casually, turning away again, "there are hells upon earth that can be very pleasant places indeed. Now, this tapestry."

Jules pointed with a suede-shod foot and Lorely saw with interest that he was wearing yellow socks. His socks, and the tapestry: these, at least, she could understand. "The design," Jules digressed in his best guide-book manner, "is characteristic, not only of Italian craftsmanship but of the Latin temperament. Observe the fluidity of the lines, and the colours, clear, sanguine,

sunny. Optimistic. Lady Cluer," Jules loosed an unexpected shaft, "do you think your husband will like this room?"

"Well, he won't be here much." Lorely's eyes rested uncertainly on the door to Jan's room, the little distant lonely door.

Jules exclaimed, in mock horror, "You mean, that in all this amorous company, indeed, right under the nose of cupid himself, you propose to sleep alone?"

"Well, I wouldn't, I mean, with my husband right next door."

"I agree. That might be awkward. But there are other occasions."

There was no mistaking Jules's meaning now. Lorely thought, you always knew, when men started talking about beds. Or even before. Under the compulsion of his dark eyes in which there was a point of light like an approaching flame, Lorely felt a weakening in her limbs. The house was so still. No one would come, unless she rang. There was a key. How easy it would be! Easy, yet impossible. . . .

Dreading that Jules might approach her, Lorely took a step backwards. He must not come near her. The priest had said so. There must be something between them, a table, anything. But the nearest table seemed miles away, with the lilies on it, near the corner where the Italian marble stood on its pedestal.

She picked up her skirts and moved swiftly towards it. "The marble!" she cried, a little wildly. "You said it was real. Tell me about that." In the great mirror she caught the blue flash of her own garments. She was running away from Jules. It must be obvious. And there was not far to run. . . .

A little out of breath, close to the protecting table, she turned. Jules was still standing where she had left him. How absurd it seemed! Perhaps he was thinking of something else altogether, of some other man in her life. . . .

"Ah—the marble!" he cried in a loud interested voice, as though he had just remembered it. She held her ground as he came towards her with his heavy stealthy tread. He came right past her and stood before the marble looking up at it with

an expression from which the dissimulation was momentarily absent.

In the face of this sculptured woman, centuries dead, there was a living dignity, the record of pain and resignation; and a compelling peace. From under the close band of a coif-like head-dress that might have been a mourning veil the sightless eyes, that had looked upon and mastered the secrets of their own history, gazed now into infinity with a perpetual yet ennobling sadness. It seemed that the marble took the light to itself so that in the shadows it glowed there, white, shrouded, immured in secrecy and yet alive.

"I should apologise," Jules commented, "for spending so much on this. When it came under the hammer I had to have it."

"Oh, why?" Lorely was divided between enquiry, relief, and a vague resentment that Jules seemed to have transferred his interest so readily from herself to this marble lady.

"Why do you think?" Jules prompted her. "Look at it."

Lorely looked as she was bidden. She even went quite close to the marble. "It's got a crack," she discovered, feeling pleased with herself, "a join, you can see it. Is that why? I mean, you said, is it so very old?"

"It's perfect," Jules answered shortly.

"You like it?" she asked timidly, dimly aware that she was being inadequate.

"Don't you?"

"Well, I." A thought struck Lorely. "Would you like to have it?" she asked him. Perhaps this would be a way to please him, after all, something that she could safely give him, instead of . . . her thoughts slid away from the omission.

Lorely had never before seen in Jules's features this fervent and authentic pleasure. You could see now how young he was. "Do you mean that?" he queried, "you know, it's valuable."

"Do you want it?"

"Nearly as much as I want you."

At once she was thrown into fresh confusion. She hurried erratically to the marble, reached up her arms, and tried to lift it.

It was as immovable as a wall. "Please take it!" she gasped, straining at it, "I would like you to have it." She fell back, defeated.

She felt his eyes upon her, mocking yet grateful. "My dear, if you mean it, I can never thank you sufficiently. But I can scarcely stagger with it in my arms down Pall Mall."

"Of course I mean it."

Jules bowed. "Thank you," he repeated, "thank you."

"I will have it sent." Lorely considered the marble more attentively. Now that she had given it away, she saw that it was interesting, something that you could look at during the long hours when there was nothing much to do. Still, it was comforting to give it to Jules. She wished she could have lifted it down and handed it to him. She was vaguely disappointed, it did not seem like giving something unless you actually gave it with your two hands.

"Why did you give me that?"

Lorely moved away from the marble, round to the side of the protective table and stared at Jules through the lilies, with round eyes, silently. Whatever answer she made, she was sure he would turn it to his own purposes.

"Can it be," he suggested, "that now you have got this room, you don't find it so interesting? Is there something missing?"

"Well, I've not had much time," she replied cautiously, "I've not properly looked."

"I am not suggesting that you should check the contents. But I would like to know why you wanted a room like this?" Jules cast a glance about him. "This is a setting for adventure. Not a place to sleep."

"I will sleep here."

"But you could sleep, and I'm sure more peacefully, in an ordinary bedroom. Instead of in an Italian Renaissance harem. . . ."

"But I don't like ordinary bedrooms! They're dull."

"I don't think you'd find my company dull, even in an ordinary bedroom."

From far away back, Lorely remembered a gipsy pedlar who

had once put his foot inside her door and refused to go away. Jules was like that man, he had the same bad dark eyes, appraising her boldly, bright with mischief. Only now, she had no door to slam.

"Come out from behind those lilies," Jules commanded, "and tell me why you find life dull."

Lorely moved slightly, but to the other side of the table. "I never said that."

"But you do, don't you? Find it dull?"

Lorely peered at Jules reproachfully. "How did you know?"

His eyes snapped triumphantly. "Then why are you running away from me? Am I dull?"

"I'm not running away."

Jules took a step towards Lorely. At once she retreated, becoming taut, ready to flee. Jules stood still again and his lips parted in a smile, a bold and disarming merriment. Lorely had to smile, too, he was such a rogue, and so handsome. She didn't know what she'd do, if he didn't go, and soon. . . .

"Do you know," Jules remarked, "you really are extremely beautiful? In that gown, you look like Mary Magdalene, like a fallen saint."

Lorely's brows lowered sharply. "Fallen?" she queried suspiciously.

"Fallen from heaven. Why don't you like me?"

She murmured weakly, "But I do."

"I have my doubts. You've got what you wanted from me—this room, this beautiful hypocrisy of a bedroom, exactly like the best class of mortuary."

She interposed indignantly, "It's not like a mortuary!"

"No?" his brows lifted in amusement. "Then I must have failed. For I designed this room, in all its funereal panoply, the purple, the candles, the grieving lilies, in the hope of seeing your virtue, laid out in that bed, that fantastic bier, totally and finally moribund."

He was coming closer. Lorely knew she ought to move away, but she couldn't. She was like a paralysed rabbit, awaiting its end, dreading yet longing for it.

"And now you don't want me. I've given you your funeral parlour, and I can go."

He stood over her, his dark desirous face close to her own. What was the use of denying him? She wanted him, had always wanted him, and she knew that he knew it. She felt his mouth upon hers, strong and pleasurable, and a sensual warmth flooded through her, carrying away her resistance on a hot tide of inevitability. She let herself go, caring for nothing but this release from argument, this ultimate simplicity of submission. Then it seemed that, on the moment of expiry, when she could resist no longer, there came floating across her mind like driftwood, the wrack of her faith, the words of the Memorare, '*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, she clung to the spar, struggling weakly, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left unaided. . . .*'

Lorely felt herself lifted off her feet, the room swung round her, there was a dizzy glimpse of blue in the mirror, of fire, and the heavy whiteness of the lilies.

"My beautiful," she heard Jules's voice, sounding rough and natural, no longer smooth or amused. "We talk too much."

She was being carried across the room. Even in her distraction, she thought how comfortable she was, how easily Jules's arms bore her. He must be used to doing this.

The bed yielded gently to her weight. It was of an extreme and downy softness. She could feel Jules's hands at her feet, easing off her slippers. She lay there weakly, and apparently passively.

Yet all the time there was struggling within her a strong will for survival. Just as she had no wish to die, neither did she intend to yield to this whirlpool, this treachery of desire. She had never consciously reasoned with herself about her feelings, but she knew that, if she did, her conclusions would be these. Obscurely, she wondered how she came to be in this danger?

She felt Jules's lips at her throat, his smooth dark head under her hands, and an animal joy and longing weakened her afresh. His lips travelled across her skin, to her hair, her eyes, her

mouth. He drew away, and she opened her eyes confusedly. Oh, but it was plain to read in his eyes, in their shining and confident depths, that he was sure of her! If only she were sure of herself!

"Well, my beautiful?" he asked her.

"Well, what?"

"Did we lock the door?"

"I didn't." Even to her own ears, her response sounded uncertain.

"Then—may I? I could even wait with decorum behind the curtain."

"Wait for what?" Lorely had a suspicion that Jules was taking her for granted, and it was a thought that she did not much like.

"For you to get into this distracting bed. You drive me to crudities." What a woman she was! Almost, you had to write everything down.

"I'm not going to bed!" Lorely cast round her helplessly for some excuse. "It's half-past three."

"My dear, you are." Suppressing a smile, Jules sought her lips again. But her hands pressed against him and now there was strength in them. "Oh, no, I'm not!" Lorely knew as she spoke that, this time, she meant it. It would be wonderful, but dreadful, she was sure of that.

"And why not?" Lorely could not determine whether Jules took her seriously or not. There was a reason, she knew there was, if she could only think of it.

Released at least of Jules's pinioning weight, she attempted to think and, out of nowhere, there came the answer, the face of Jan, dear, familiar, unamused, safe-looking. He was her husband. Their passion was sanctified. Here, then, was the answer to Jules.

Lorely levered herself against the pillows and sat up. "It's . . . it's adultery," she stated.

The ardour in Jules's face cooled abruptly. He drew away from Lorely and stared at her with amazement. Never in his life had a woman looked him in the eyes and said anything about

adultery. It was the most brazen thing he ever heard. In fact he could scarcely believe that she intended it as a serious objection.

"I agree, this room is highly sanctimonious—but is this the time to quote the commandments?" His tone was tinged with sarcasm.

"The commandments are there all the time."

"I know. But I'm not. Be honest. You brought me in on this because you wanted me. And I came because I wanted you."

"I don't think that was the reason." Lorely could see, she'd annoyed him. She would be safe now.

"I can see that our virtues are incompatible. Chastity and honesty make poor bedfellows. For whom do you reserve this priceless jewel?"

"What jewel?"

"Your virtue. Or rather that compound of immodesty and humbug that bears the proud title?"

She protested, ruffled by the sceptical gleam in his eyes. "I can be virtuous if I want to."

"But you don't. No, Lady Cluer, I suspect you are neither virtuous nor honest." Jules stood up, straightened his tie and smoothed his hair. He'd waste no more time on a woman who was likely to turn him loose and then hurl the Bible at him. He found it hard to recall that he had ever desired her, so swiftly had desire died. Yet he was still irked by curiosity. He had not known her body; and now it seemed that he would never know her mind, for she must have one, of a sort. He rarely failed with women. Now he had been beaten, and by the most stupid woman he had ever known. How had she fooled him?

Jules turned back to where Lorely was still sitting up stiffly on the fabulous bed. Her eyes met his, reproachful, indignant, even childishly pugnacious. A little of his ill-humour left him.

"Pray don't look at me so wrathfully," he rebuked her, "my manners, after all, if not my inclinations, are those of a gentleman. Tell me again," he demanded, with swift acuity, "to whom are you faithful?"

In Lorely's silence, there was a kind of tenacity. It was more

clear than ever, that she had a secret, and that secret, Jules now realised, had at no time concerned himself.

"Can it be," he prompted, "that this resistance shows an unmodern fidelity to your marriage vows?"

The conflict left Lorely's face. "You are right," she responded, warmly and simply, "I love my husband." How easy it was! She could have said so before.

Jules stepped down from the dais. "Your husband, I'm sure, will be gratified," he remarked lightly, "that his efforts to keep us apart have proved so successful."

"What efforts? What are you saying?"

Turning, Jules saw that Lorely was sitting forward on the bed. The obstinacy and the sulks had vanished. Her expression, indeed, her whole body seemed to be tingling with some scarcely-suppressed emotion that could be hope, and might be excitement.

"But I may be mistaken," Jules amended cautiously.

"What was it? What did he say?"

She was wide-open, defenceless. So it was for the husband, Jules thought wryly, for the old slow-poke, all this, the extravagance, and the illusion; for his unseeing eyes, the stupid legend, the passion, and Lorely's hope. And Jan himself was up to something, Jules was sure.

Jules stood a little way out in the room, considering his discovery. If he told Lorely his suspicions of Jan? Momentarily, the purple of the walls shifted and swung in his mind, flaunting the forlorn banner of a lost cause. As if he would tell Lorely! He knew nothing, anyway. . . .

"Your husband," he commented coolly, "was quite indignant at my offer to design the rest of this house, gratis, for the pleasure of your charming company. Why, I have no idea."

Jules retreated to the arch and allowed Lorely to consider this information. She was sitting in the middle of the bed, apparently thinking it out. The possibilities, he could see, would occupy her for months.

At the arch, Jules paused. "You know," he remarked, loudly and arrestingly, "you really should have gone to bed with me."

Lorely looked up. "But I couldn't," she replied abstractedly. "And what was the reason? Tell me again before distance lends disenchantment."

"You're not my husband." She adhered to it automatically.

"My dear, it's because I'm not your husband . . . that you should." Jules bowed swiftly, parted the purple curtain, and was gone.

As he ran lightly down the broad staircase, Jules was still considering his failure. As usual, he realised, he'd had too much to say: words could be as provocative as women, and considerably more tractable. In silence, he might have got Lorely. Even so, there was a doubt. In some things, she reacted with the formidable imperception of a robot. Having determined her unwieldy course, there was no stopping her. Unlike most women, she had not the imagination to be deterred by what he might think of her.

Somewhere inside Jules, supplanting his recent anger, there was welling an immense laughter. As he ran on down the stairs, between each step there parted like a final derisive smile, the yellow flash of his socks.

Chapter Twenty

IT WAS TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING when the telephone rang at Jan's bedside reminding Jan that the birth of Adele's child was imminent. Although Jan was fast asleep at the time, he answered it instantly and was entirely awake. Adele, he knew, had been in labour since the morning, and he had been in touch with the nursing-home throughout the day. He had left there only a few hours previously, on the assurance that the birth was not anticipated until the small hours. He had returned home, hoping to snatch a few hours' sleep and to evade explaining a prolonged absence to Lorely and the servants.

As Jan rose and dressed, he considered the elaborate plans entailed in ensuring that he was awakened and that no other member of the household received the vital call. Unable, for

once, to rely on being called by the servants, Jan had asked the telephone exchange to call him. Even so, there had been the problem of the switchboard, of making sure that a night call would ring only in his room. Normally, Jan never went near the switchboard, which was in a cubby-hole off the stairs leading to the basement. The things you had to do, the plans you had to make, to set a switch in your own house! It was like committing a burglary. Still, the thing was accomplished, and there had been no hitch.

As methodically as possible, ignoring his rising anxiety and excitement, Jan continued his dressing. He was ready to go, when there came a tap on the locked communicating door between his room and Lorely's.

"Darling," he heard her call out, "are you all right? Are you ill?"

Jan turned cold. He could feel the sweat breaking round his mouth and brow. What had wakened Lorely? Surely not the phone, she slept through air-raids, thunderstorms, anything. He tried to think clearly. If he made a dash for it, leaving the light burning, he would still have to explain when he came back. Moreover, she might hear him, and intercept him on the landing. She might be on her way round to his landing door at this moment. He could lock it and lock himself in. He would then have to undress and get back to bed before he answered her; and he wasn't going to do that. If he tried to slip out, leaving both doors locked and the light burning, Lorely would batter till she roused the whole household.

Jan stepped quietly to the bedside and switched off the lamp. He stood there in the darkness with the blood thumping through him and, for the moment, not a coherent thought in his head. There was a light step outside the landing door, a click, and the room filled with what, to Jan, seemed to be a blinding light. Lorely stood in the open doorway. She was wearing an unfastened *négligée* over her night-dress and appeared to be slightly out of breath.

"Darling," she began rapidly, "—I thought . . ." Her eyes took in the British warm Jan was wearing, his collar and tie, the

gloves, the hat in his hand. "But you're dressed!" she realised slowly. "Absolutely dressed. Where are you going?"

"I've . . . got something to work out . . ." Jan fell back on the old excuse of his work. He himself had no artistic temperament, but some writers did strange things at strange times, and Lorely knew it. Though nothing, surely, as strange as this!

"But it's the middle of the night!" she protested.

"I know. That's why."

"But it's cold. Everybody says so."

"You've not been out for weeks."

"People are saying it's never been cold like this. Even with the heating and the fire, it's cold." Lorely shivered. "You're surely not going to sit writing out of doors?"

"I want to think."

"But what about? Can't you think in your warm bed?"

"If I could, I would." Jan was pulling himself together. If he could keep this ^{up} he might get away with it yet. But he was in a fever to be off.

Lorely's eyes, that had so little perception of what he was thinking, had other guides. He saw them grow round with speculation and a reluctant doubt. "But . . . you look . . . you might be going to a meeting." Then the wifely eyes noticed something else. "And you've shaved! In the middle of the night."

Jan rubbed his chin. It was true, he was not going unshaven and in a muffler to meet his son: still less, his daughter. Did you shave in the grip of inspiration? Or in search of it?

"I shaved for dinner," he lied harshly, "maybe you didn't notice."

"I'm sure I would." Doubt struggled with reproach in Lorely's thoughts. "You know . . . I believe . . . but then, of course, you wouldn't tell me . . . and then, if you were, you'd surely go earlier."

"Go where?"

"Well . . . you know what I mean. Somewhere else. You don't have to get up in the middle of the night to . . . to . . ."

Lorely's eyes grew large with the enormity of her own im-

plications. Jan could see that she was not seriously accusing him. She was more puzzled than reproachful. But she would not let the matter rest unless he could reassure her.

"My dear, you're jumping to conclusions. You don't believe them yourself." Because it was half-true, Jan could look Lorely in the eyes until the doubt, and even a little of the unhappiness had left them. Jan was hating every moment of this interview. He was, he felt, being brought face to face with himself, with his own errors, injustices, and indignities; and there was no excuse that he could offer to himself. He did not know how it was that he came to be standing here in the middle of the night, fully dressed, trying to keep his wife from knowing that he was on the way to attend the birth of his child by another woman. In a way his world had gone mad. Somehow he had to keep sane in the midst of it.

Lorely saw kindness in Jan's face, and distress, and something besides, that she could not analyse. It was not love, she would have known that; but, all the same, he did look for a moment like the Jan she used to know. Dimly, she felt that she had caused him some distress and she tried to put it right. "I didn't really think that . . . that you . . ." she floundered, ". . . but . . . I couldn't think of anything . . . it wasn't what I really thought. I thought you might be sick or something . . . a chill . . . it's so cold."

Jan asked, "What woke you?"

"I don't know. I just sat up, and there was the light under your door. Like a mother, when its child's ill."

Jan winced. "I'm not ill."

Impulsively, Lorely urged, "Come and tell me what you were going to write, what was worrying you." She passed Jan, went to the communicating door, and unlocked it. "Come in here," she invited, "it's warmer. There's no hurry."

Jan hesitated. There was no reason that he could think of for pleading haste. He did not know which he dreaded most, to be trapped in that inordinate, pathetic room with Lorely; or to strike at the wistful hope in her expression by refusing.

Jan followed Lorely a short way into her room and then

paused. With a little air of relief and happiness she hurried to the fireplace and poked the embers of the log-fire into a bright flame. Then, lifting it carefully and clumsily between the long fingers of the tongs, she threw on another log.

From the doorway, Jan watched Lorely, noting her queenly beauty and the grace of her movements. She looked her best at night, her face and figure softened and natural, her magnificent hair, plaited, reaching nearly to her waist. The thought crossed his mind, painfully, that she should have a lover. What right had he to leave her at the mercy of men such as Jules? In the distance, the ethereal bed glimmered and gleamed like an airy gilded boat, its gossamer draperies like white sails webbed with the gold light of the lamp at its side. Yet it looked lonely. The enormous room itself was filled with a loneliness that weighed upon Jan's spirit and was unassuageable because it seemed that there was nothing that he could do about it; nothing that he could do for Lorely that would fill this empty room, or bring it to life.

Lorely turned to Jan, her face bright with pleasure at having made up the fire by herself. "That's better!" she declared, "come by the warm . . ."

Jan came forward. "I don't think I'd better," he resisted her carefully. "I'll get sleepy."

"Don't go out," she pleaded suddenly, "it's so cold. Stay here."

"My dear, if I weakened in my resolve so easily, I'd never do any work at all."

"Work," she protested, "at this time! You are a silly. What is it—a poem?"

"You know I don't write poems," Jan answered incautiously.

"You used to."

"I'm an old man now."

"You're not! We're young still." Lorely moved closer to the fire and the glow of the flames moulded her long body in its clinging lavender gown. In the shadows and pallor of her disturbed night her dark eyes burned with the sadness of inextinguishable memories. "You wrote me a poem once. I remember it."

"Do you?"

"Don't you?"

Jan remembered writing the poem. In his mind, he saw clearly the stranger who was himself, writing to the stranger that he had thought was Lorely. Gradually the years had disclosed to him a woman who was not the all-loving, all-understanding personality with whom he had fallen in love. What could you know of anyone in a courtship of five weeks? In time, Lorely's blindness to realities had made Jan angry, had given him a sense of imprisonment in his marriage in place of the widening of experience for which he had hoped. But was it her fault? He should not have tried to make her enter into subjects that she could not understand. If you estimated people wrongly, should you blame them for what, after all, was your own mistake? He had asked too much of her, and then chastised her for failing. Yet she still loved him, loved the memory of a man who had written a poem to a woman who did not exist.

"I remember it," Jan answered woodenly.

"I suppose that when we're young, or younger, we don't think, we aren't the same . . . I mean . . ." Lorely dared to put it plainly, "we change, don't we?"

"We grow. I don't think it means we change. We were probably the same in the beginning. But you can't tell what anything is going to be like until it's fully grown. People, especially."

"You mean?" Lorely struggled to understand, "that you're still the same as you were when you wrote that poem?"

"I expect so. Older."

"And that I'm the same? To you?"

"You're older, too." Jan smiled as he spoke.

"But we don't . . . we're not . . ." it came out with a rush, "you never used to sleep . . ." Lorely broke off. Jan's face, as he stood in front of her behind the white couch, was locked again in an expression she could not understand. It was as though he were shut away behind that face and could not reach her if he tried, any more than she could reach him. What had happened to him? She was sure now that he had a secret

from her, something that had nothing to do with herself.

Prisoned inside himself, Jan saw it all, the course of Lorely's thoughts, the slow, stumbling way of her confusion and incomprehension. A word, a gesture from him would steady and comfort her. It would be simple, and yet was impossible because of Adele, her present suffering, her desperate fear that Jan would give back to Lorely the smallest symbol of the love that Adele had claimed as her own. At this time, least of all, could Jan betray Adele.

Yet it was like looking on and seeing a child stumble, and being unable to assist. In this moment, if Jan could have willed it, he wanted nothing except that the years should turn back, far enough for him to be able to speak, to go now to Lorely, for no other reason but that she needed him.

He could not do it. Instead, he turned aside her unhappy half question, "You won't get any sleep at all if I keep you up like this. And I'm determined not to be tempted from my—walk." In his effort not to admit strain, Jan's voice emerged sounding falsely cheerful.

Lorely had not seriously hoped that Jan would explain or respond to her. She made the best of it. "Nobody could tempt you from anything, I don't believe," she retorted.

Jan turned to go. "I have my temptations," he replied.

Lorely remained standing beside the fireplace. She did not feel unduly unhappy. Even though, as usual, nothing had worked out as she would have wished, she had taken a curious and inexplicable comfort from Jan's silence. Moreover, something was stirring in her mind, something that she could do, could look for, that would please her. Jan had reached the door by the time she realised what it was. She called after him, "That poem. You know, Jan, I think I could find it. I believe I've still got it."

At the doorway, Jan looked back. Here, then, was something that he could say, truthfully, that might leave Lorely feeling happier. A faint smile eased the harsh lines of his face. "So have I," he replied, and went out.

The moment Jan had gone, Lorely moved. She felt wide awake and she knew exactly what she wanted to do. She went

quickly to a small gilded bureau that stood beside the fireplace. On it was a large inlaid rosewood and ivory box. Opening the box, Lorely took out a bundle of papers, tied with broad blue satin ribbon, and hurried back with it to the white and gold couch. But something was still unsettling her, the room was not right, the atmosphere . . . the lighting.

Standing on a table before the great shadowy mirror there was a heavy wooden candelabra. Lorely took a taper, lighted it from the fire, and carried it across to the candelabra. The tiny naked flame approached the mirror like a lamp being carried out of darkness. One by one, the purple candles took fire, soaring in gold steeples spired with velvet smoke. A nimbus, a glory, grew round the flames. Above them, Lorely's eyes met their reflection in the mirror with a gaze softly radiant, dark and dedicated. There was no light to equal this original, living fire.

Crossing to the bedside, Lorely extinguished the lamp there. Now only the candles remained, burning like spirits in a misty cloud against the purple-black shadows. Lorely returned to the candelabra and lifted and carried it to a table beside the couch.

In the warming, heartening radiance of candlelight and fire-light, Lorely stretched her toes to the hearth and untied the bundle of papers. It contained two smaller packets, each tied up in narrower blue ribbon. One packet, which she set aside, contained Jan's letters. The other, which she opened, contained mementoes, souvenirs, old programmes. Still folded within one of the dance programmes, where she had placed it on the night he had given it to her, was Jan's poem. '*Gentle Lady*' she began to read, twisting the paper to the firelight:

*'Gentle lady, the midnight air
Breathes your name, and where
The summer's flame' . . .*

Lorely read the poem through to the end. Jan had explained that, to him, she and the beauty of the summer night had somehow become one, because he loved her. How, she did not know. Only that he loved her. Tonight, he had said you did

not change. Perhaps it was true, and these beautiful, incomprehensible words, also, were still true? Later, she would read the letters.

Jan's son arrived at the nursing home a quarter of an hour before his father. By the time Jan, aseptically robed and masked lest a breath from his seasoned existence should contaminate the uncontaminated, first looked upon his son, Jan, junior, was forty-two minutes old. He was all there, ten fingers, ten toes, nothing missing, eight pounds seven ounces of apparently irreproachable physical matter. Here he was, after the doubting months, the supreme conjuring trick, life reproducing itself in darkness and secrecy, incredibly without error.

Experience, Jan thought, looking upon the sleeping infant, had nothing to offer beyond this miracle: that from the ungainly antics of the body and the occasional pieties with which you sought to hallow them, should come this cherished, marvellous life, this perfect flesh, the unknown welcomed soul.

As, an hour later, Jan went out again into the mad arctic wastes of that bitter winter, under the starless sky, with a black, snow-filled wind threatening to seal the blood in his veins, he was aware only of the fire in his heart, of his own flesh, Adele and the newly-born, sleeping warmly in the silence and mystery of his night. He felt tremendous, magnificent. He cared nothing for what anyone could think or say, for Everett, or Lena, or even Jules. He was the instrument and servant of a law that was primitive and unanswerable and deep with joy. *He was a father!*

Chapter Twenty-One

ADELE WAS CARELESS ABOUT THE KEY OF HER FRONT DOOR. Sometimes she would slip out to the post or to the dairy round the corner without troubling to find the key and take it with her. Strangers rarely came to the end of the Mews, and she was not worried about the tradespeople. She was therefore surprised to return one afternoon and find that the

front door, that she had pulled to, had been pushed wide open.

Even so, she was not alarmed. She ran confidently up the stairs and into the front room without an idea that there was anyone in the flat but herself and the three months old baby.

Sitting in an arm-chair in the window with the baby on his lap, was Justin.

The sight of her husband gave Adele a paralysing shock. Her eyes went over him swiftly, registering even after the years apart those details which identified him as being a part of herself, instantly recognisable in any crowd, anywhere. She saw that although he was only thirty, the flesh at the sides of his mouth and jowls was already sagging in heavy dispirited folds. His fine sandy hair had receded and there was a shiny brown patch on top, at the back, where it had fled altogether. His too light grey suit had a rubbery look as though it were lightly filled with air: he was much fatter. His long thin feet were cased in a pair of cracked-looking pale tan shoes and he wore white woollen socks.

The baby lay wide awake in the crook of Justin's arm. As Adele paused in the doorway, Justin lifted a long fat finger and prodded the baby in the region of its diaper. The baby gurgled and Justin's face lightened slowly in the kind and pleasant smile that, Adele remembered, was his nicest attribute. He made a clucking sound and the baby began to thresh his arms and legs in appreciation.

A livid fear took hold of Adele as she realised that Justin would be bound to recognise that the child was hers. Her secret would come out. There would be a scandal. She might lose Jan.

Adele saw herself as she must appear in Justin's eyes: her full breasts, the new maternal plumpness of her figure. Could she pretend that the child was not her own? As the idea suggested itself, Justin turned and saw her.

The reproach in his pale blue eyes made her feel, as it always had done, aggressive and resentful. He had always wanted her to be something that she was not. Well, now she had not only given him cause to reproach her, she had provided him with an

instrument of punishment with which he could devastate everything that was in the life she had made without him.

"Justin!" His name rose to her lips and there was for the moment no strength left in her mind or voice to hide the shock he had given her.

Justin had flushed, it was apparent in his expression rather than in the intense tan of his skin. He stood up and carefully deposited the child in a corner of the chair. "Is this yours?" he enquired in the crudely outspoken fashion that had always offended her.

"Nol Nol" The denial came from her spontaneously. She felt her resources rushing in to sustain her, to keep him from finding out anything that might harm Jan. "Of course he's not mine." She bent over the child, hiding her face, and was grateful now for the fact that baby Jan did not resemble her. Indeed, she had often to struggle against the feeling that he was not her child at all. Sometimes, when he regarded her with his worldly dark eyes which seemed potentially to know more about everything than she did herself, she wondered if there had been any mistake at his birth, if he were a changling, or if it were merely that she had no true maternal instinct. Yet she knew that he was hers, he had her hands, and ears, and his mouth was Jan's, there was no mistaking that. He was very fair, too, although most babies were fair. She straightened with the child in her arms. "I'm minding him for a friend," she qualified.

"Are you minding his father?"

"Why?"

"You've got a man here. His clothes are in the wardrobe . . ."

"Have you been searching my home?"

"I was looking for you. I heard the baby crying. The wardrobe was open."

"He's not mine." Adele felt trapped, sick with alarm.

"You've got a lover, and that's his child. He features you, too."

"He's no more like me than he's like you! Anyway, he's too young to look like anyone."

"Well, he's not mine. We know that. Who's the father?"

"What's it got to do with you?" Adele knew now that she had not kept the truth from Justin. Fear, and her natural antagonism towards him, sharpened her tongue. "You haven't thought of me for years. What are you doing here now?"

"I've been looking for you for a couple of days. I thought you were in Paris. I see I'm *de trop*."

"Sit down," she said curtly. The baby, halfway between sleeping and waking, was whimpering. "I must put him down. You've disturbed his rest."

"He's disturbed mine." Adele heard the calculation in Justin's tone and fear chilled her afresh. He was so literal, so lacking in imagination, she knew that no pleading or argument of hers would sway him if he decided to act on his legal and moral rights in this situation. Supposing he went to Jan and made a scene? If only she had locked her door!

When Adele came back after settling the baby in his cot, Justin had taken down the plaster head of Jan and was examining it by the window. "Is this him?" he asked.

"Put it down!" she protested, "it's nobody you know."

"It's the same man whose photo's by your bed, isn't it?" he replied reasonably. "I suppose there's no reason why you should be alone. Is the baby his?"

"My life's nothing to do with you. I'm not going to tell you anything."

Justin's round blue eyes saw through her, as they had always done. Adele thought that there was a trace of jealousy in them as well as interest. "You wouldn't have a baby with me," he pointed out. "I thought you didn't like them?"

"Need we go into that?" she objected. "We're different people now."

"We're not. You're no different. You always would have your own way. I wonder if he knows it?" Justin studied the model of Jan's head for a moment, twisting it in his large flabby hands. "Who is he?" he asked.

"What difference does it make?"

"None, I suppose. You'll treat him the same . . ."

Justin went to the niche and replaced the model. Adele

watched him and wondered if he realised how much she was afraid of him? In a way, he looked, and possibly felt, pathetic: heavy and lumpy and unloved in his papery suit with his run-over heels. Could it be that he was hard up? His family had money. But then he was always lazy about dress. Whatever his circumstances, his coming represented as great a menace as anything that had happened to her since the Germans arrested her in Paris. A shiver went through Adele as she realised anew that nothing in life, whatever the evidence to the contrary, was permanent or secure or to be trusted.

Justin came back to the fireplace. "Does this man know you're married?"

Adele abandoned her pretence. "Of course he knows."

"Doesn't he want to marry you?"

Adele was silent.

"Or he's married?" Too late, she saw that her silence had confirmed it.

"If you want a divorce," she suggested desperately, "you can get it easily. I deserted you, didn't I? . . ."

Justin's eyes roved across the elegant little room.

"Who'd pay the costs?"

"I'll pay them, if you can't."

"What makes you think I want a divorce?"

"Don't you?"

"It makes no difference to me." He stressed his solitary situation with a hint of self-pity. "At least."

"At least, what?"

"He's well-off, isn't he?"

Adele's heart sank. "He's not so well-off," she countered. "I have some money, you know. I bought a lot of this."

"If he keeps you as his mistress, and presumably he has another home, he can't be short. Women cost money. Even I know that."

"I'll give you some money, if you need it."

"I know how much you've got," Justin said coolly, "and it's not in the region of divorce damages. You're anxious to keep this quiet, aren't you?" He went back to the arm-chair and sat in

it, crossing his plump thighs. Adele thought that he seemed to be without any sort of emotion. He did not seem to care greatly what happened. She could not tell at this stage whether he really needed money, or wanted his freedom. By his factual manner, he might have been reasoning out a minor problem. An idea crossed her mind that, perhaps, he secretly desired his revenge on her for leaving him? For the first time, she wished she had been kinder to him.

Adele sat down on the green couch and summoned all her intelligence to outwit him. "Naturally, I'm not anxious for a scandal," she said in conciliatory tones. "There's nothing strange in that."

"Do you think I care how you feel?" There was no doubting Justin's indifference. In truth, it was as much as she could expect from him.

"I suppose not," she admitted. "But your family? They wouldn't like it?"

"There's only father. Mother died." Justin did not look at Adele. She knew he had been his mother's favourite. He explained, "Father thinks Chilawattee does better without me. He's put in a superintendant."

"Couldn't you manage the estate?"

"Well, you know what those Tamslo coolies are, and I never was good at the lingo. We had a strike, several strikes. There was a blight, too, but that wasn't my doing. Tea's falling, anyway."

"What are you going to do?"

"That depends." Justin took a tobacco tin out of his pocket and a packet of cigarette papers, and rolled himself a cigarette. There was something seedy and practised in the facility with which he did this. Adele thought of Jan's gold cigarette-case, his beautiful hands. Yet Justin, not Jan, was her husband. He could ruin Jan, could bring down all the things Jan valued most, his dignity, his duty, his honour. Dared she tell Jan about Justin, now? As much as she was afraid of Justin, she was ashamed of him. She would die if Jan met him.

"Depends on what," she prompted him. "Have you got a

job? Any prospects?" It seemed a futile hope. She realised now, everything about him screamed that he was unemployed.

Justin contemplated the toe of a cracked shoe while he considered his reply. 'I'm his prospect,' Adele thought with despair, 'he'll never let me go.'

Justin looked across at Adele and settled himself in the chair as though he had come to stay. It was Jan's chair. Regarding him with detestation, Adele found herself wondering if he had bathed, and what sort of underwear he had on?

"You owe me something." Justin pursued his own thoughts with apparent composure. "It won't interest you, but you finished me. I never got going again after you left me. As far as you were concerned, I might have been your landlord, someone to whom you couldn't even give the courtesy of a week's notice. Your own mother was shocked. But you meant to go, and you went; and if I cared, you didn't. What's a scandal, to me?"

Adele thought peevishly that it was his own fault if he'd gone to pieces when she left him. He'd always given up when the littlest things went wrong.

"If it's money you're in need of," she tried to appease him, "I'll give you some."

"You can't. Your capital's tied up."

"You can have the interest."

"That won't buy me a farm."

She saw that he was like all weak people; having found something to cling to, he was not letting go. Jan could buy him a farm, several farms. She was sure that, somehow, Justin knew it. He had an eye for the value of things: probably it had not missed the gold brushes on her dressing-table, her furs, or the Sheraton pieces she and Jan had been collecting. Suddenly she wanted to hide, to run, anywhere . . . it was like the minutes that she waited in prison, and knew that they were going to try some other means to question her.

"Is that why you came," she asked him helplessly, "to ask me to buy you a farm?"

"I'm not joking. I could and I would buy a farm, if I'd the cash."

"Well, you won't get it from us. We haven't got it."

"I can try."

Justin's expression was implacable. Adele remembered the power she once had over him, of how she could cast him into despondency or lift him to pleasure by the simplest word or gesture. Now, when she wanted him, she had lost him. He would go to law against her if it would get him a farm. She could think of nothing to stop him.

"You don't know who he is," she thought of it suddenly. "You can't cite a man whose name you don't know."

"It shouldn't take me long to find out." Justin was moved by a mild curiosity. "Why are you so keen to keep him out of it?"

"He'd nothing to do with you and me."

"He knows you're another man's wife."

"I haven't told him." Adele gave it away on the spur of the moment, in the hope of appealing to Justin's sympathy.

"I'll tell him." Justin drew on the weedy cigarette between his stained fingers. He did not seem particularly interested in learning anything more about Jan. Only the practical aspects of the matter concerned him. "He'd have to prove he didn't know you were married," he reasoned. "He'd have a job."

"You'll have a job to find him."

"Do you think so?"

Across the room, Justin's eyes met Adele's and she saw in them a flat resolve to get as much as he could out of this opportunity that had presented itself. If his look had been inimical, if there had been anger in it, or resentment, Adele felt she could have opposed him. But there was no quarrelling with this logical and, she realised, just assessment of the dues they owed each other from their past. She knew now that unless she could think of a way to frustrate him, Justin would make good his threat. The papers would get hold of the case, there would be headlines, the whole thing would come out. Even now, Adele was not sure that Jan's love for her would hold against his concern for his wife. His pity was a bitter thing, he would let it kill him before he hurt anyone who loved him. And Jan's pity

for his wife was older than his love for Adele. Might it not, therefore, be stronger?

With everything that was in her, Adele suddenly wished that Justin was out of the way, dead and buried on the other side of the world where not even the proximity of his grave could disturb her. So intense was her thought that, for a moment, it seemed that Justin's chair was empty and Adele seemed to see the room as it had been before he came: cool, peaceful, unthreatened. The moment came and went like a vision and Justin was here before her eyes, filling her green brocade chair with his large blubbery body and stubbing out his horrid cigarette on her venetian glass ash-tray. With shocking violence, she thought of the difficulty of extinguishing the life in that body, of the immovable weight of it, and the strength: of how it would bleed.

To kill Justin would be her only means of silencing him. Adele knew she could not do it, not in cold blood, she had not the means, or the knowledge. Instead, in his own way and in his own time, he would kill her.

Yet there was no malice in Justin's attitude towards her now. She saw his expression change from indifference to a polite, if disinterested, concern, as though he had remembered his manners. "Put it to him yourself," he offered her, "if you prefer. I've no objection. If you want to keep it quiet, I'm quite prepared to talk things over with him, privately. Save me trouble."

He was offering her a respite, an opportunity to think over the whole horrifying situation in secrecy and calm, without his hated figure before her, his intelligent dispassionate eyes observing her and anticipating every move she might make. Once he had been her slave; but now she realised he knew her better, possibly, than anyone alive. Alone, she might still think of a way out.

"All right," she answered, and tried not to let him see that she was trembling. "Give me your address. I'll get in touch with you."

Justin brought a packet of papers from his pocket and sorted through them. "Here's an old envelope," he passed it across to her, "the address is on it. I'll expect to hear from you in a few days."

"A week," she pleaded, without reason.

"As you like. But don't leave it too long."

Justin stood up. His suit looked as rumpled as though he had slept in it and she saw that the trousers had no turn-ups. What had become of the good clothes he once possessed? She glanced at the envelope and saw that it bore a type-written address in Chelsea. It had a London post-mark, and was empty. Justin noted her inspection. "We're neighbours," he reminded her coolly.

Adele needed no reminding that Justin now lived only a quarter of an hour's distance from her. With repugnance, she put the envelope into her handbag, shrinking mentally from its contact with anything she possessed. "Please go," she said, coldly. Without another word, Justin turned and went.

As Adele heard the front door close, she was surprised to discover that she had not collapsed, or fainted, or relapsed into wild hysterics. She was trembling in every nerve but the icy calm of the control that she had forced upon herself, still held. She saw that the time was half-past two. Within an hour, Jan might arrive. With the last reserves of her will-power, she determined to keep Justin's visit from Jan's knowledge, at least until she had been able to think it over by herself. With time her tiny lie had gathered in size and now it had become something monstrous that she could not explain or control. Jan might blame her for not having told him, for having allowed this threat to hang over their life and their son's future. And Jan would be right: she was to blame. She should have told him that Justin was alive. Now she must fight it by herself, if she could. Then Jan need never think badly of her. She would ask him to take her for a drive this afternoon. Then he might be distracted from any change in her manner.

Adele stood up and looked at herself in the mirror above the fireplace. Her skin had a greenish pallor as though she were going to be sick and there were black circles under her eyes. For a weak moment, she longed to run to Jan and pour out the whole story; to feel the blood rushing back to her heart, warming and strengthening her. Jan was so kind, he always understood. But,

then, he had never had to understand anything like this. Suppose he turned as pale as she was, and paler? She had seen everything that she believed in swept away from her before. She couldn't face it again.

Adele went over to the drinks cabinet and poured herself a double brandy. It would sour her milk, but that couldn't be helped. She went to the windows and opened them both widely and, as an afterthought, switched on the electric fan. She shook up the cushions and took away Justin's ash-tray. Then she went into the bathroom and started to run a bath.

Chapter Twenty-Two

ADELE STOOD OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE to the small block of apartments in Chelsea where Justin lived, and wondered as she had done many times in the preceeding two weeks, whether she was doing the wise thing in seeing him again. But of all the alternatives that had suggested themselves, the proposition that she was now going to put before him remained the only feasible solution to her problem.

The three-storied narrow building of ugly bright-red Victorian brick was situated in a narrow and sordid street and faced a warehouse and a few small shops. Adele stepped through the open doorway and found herself in the stone wall of a building that, to her eyes, appeared more like a confined stable-yard surrounded by a number of lofts, than the entrance hall of a civilised dwelling. With a feeling of distaste she turned towards the first flight of cold stone stairs. It was like Justin to be living in a building of which the very sight chilled and depressed her. If he could not see the obvious ugliness of this place, she thought as she trudged upwards, how could she expect him to appreciate any of the subtle loyalties and difficulties that were now troubling her?

From the roof, a glass skylight threw down a cold glare upon the bleak square landings with their closed doors. She had seen pictures of prisons whose interior structure was not unlike this.

Adele became conscious of the dress she was wearing, in which she expected to meet Jan in an hour or so's time. This was a cocktail dress, simple in style but fashioned of a rich material, a silver-grey brocade woven with a metal thread. The hem of the dress was bordered with sable and over it, although the May evening was warm, she wore a short sable coat. The heavily-weighted hem brushed against her legs as she moved and she felt the gracious softness of the fur. Dress and coat, they were like an armour detaching her from this place and the people who lived here. But she knew it to be the perilous armour of a softness and luxury through which she might be wounded more grievously than if, for instance, she still wore her prison clothes and possessed the bitter strength of owning nothing.

Justin's door was on the third, and top, landing. In the bright light from the skylight as she went up the last flight of stairs, Adele noticed that the cheap wooden balustrade opposite his door was smashed, rather as though someone had dropped a heavy trunk on it. It was an ugly gap, and had probably occurred too recently to have been repaired. But, in common with the unswept bleak staircase, the omission contributed to the general atmosphere of neglect and apathy.

There was no bell beside Justin's door, and marks on the door itself showed where a previous knocker had been removed. As Adele tapped on the wood with her gloved hand she suddenly desired above all things that a stranger might open the door, someone who would tell her that Justin was not here, that he was nowhere in the world at all, and this moment was nothing but a nightmare.

When Justin himself opened the door, she felt an almost physical sickness. She still could not accustom herself to the reality of his physical presence, although she realised now how foolishly she had regarded him as non-existent, simply because she had no physical contact with him. He seemed displeased to see her, and there was also a disquieting detachment in his manner as though he no longer cared about or depended upon what she might say or do in the situation between them.

"I've got something to say to you," she greeted him without

preamble, and practically pushed past him into the room. Her one idea, now she had made up her mind, was to get the interview over and get away again.

"You've been long enough." Justin closed the door.

"I wanted to think about it," she excused herself.

"You could have answered my letters. You cut me off on the phone."

"I wasn't ready." It would not do to antagonise him.

Forcing herself to look at Justin, Adele thought that he appeared even more seedy than ever, in need of a shave and, she was sure, of a bath.

Hanging from a hook on the door behind him was a voluminous overcoat of a mustard-brown Harris tweed. Adele remembered the coat. Justin felt the cold, and it had a camel-hair lining. Wherever Justin went, his coat went, too. There were other things, also, that would have informed her that it was Justin who lived in this room. Only two other possessions of his caught her eye. One was the small gilt alarm clock beside his divan—many times had Adele glanced at its luminous hands in the night, and been awakened by its shrill whirring. The other was his typewriter, open amid a litter of papers on a desk in the window. Otherwise, Justin obviously rented the room furnished.

Because Justin was a man who was accustomed to servants, it did not surprise Adele that the room was dusty and unswept. But only Justin would keep the windows tightly shut on an evening like this. The air was stale with the odours of dust, mice, and unaired bedclothes, and seemed to be permeated with the emanations of a decay and despondency that were peculiar to Justin himself. He never lost an opportunity to make himself as uncomfortable as he could, in order that someone might be sorry for him, if it were only that he was thus able to be sorry for himself.

She would not sit down. In the middle of the room she turned to Justin with the intention of explaining her silence. "I haven't replied to your letters because——"

Justin cut her short, "I don't want to hear your reasons. You can't expect me to believe them, anyway."

"Why shouldn't you?" His attitude took her aback. She had expected him to be relieved to see her. His letters had pleaded to her sense of fair play, had appealed to her pity, her sense of justice for her to assist him to make the new start that she owed him through the wrong she had done to him. They were not difficult letters for her to set aside until she was ready to deal with them. Now she wondered what had caused him to change his attitude?

"How do I know what you're up to?" he answered her. "Nothing that you do would surprise me. It's no good your coming asking me to keep quiet."

"I'm not!"

"It's just as well." Justin met her eyes with an immovable and slightly resentful stare. Adele knew that he disliked making any kind of effort even to argue.

Adele noticed that there were some bars of soft chocolate lying on a near-by table. She thought, 'He can buy chocolate but he can't afford a hair-cut,' and she wondered whether, financially his choice lay between the two? The thought encouraged her; for if he were desperate for money, her offer might be more likely to interest him?

"I'm not asking you to keep quiet," she appeased him, "I'm asking you to wait."

Justin shook his head. She ran on quickly and confidently. "Justin, I'm seeing——" she just stopped herself from saying Jan's name. "I'm seeing—him—this evening. If I ask him, and he agrees, would you meet him? You could come to some agreement, a settlement——"

"Haven't you told him yet?"

"I've—I've not had the opportunity—he's been away——" she lied.

"It's not true."

"Why?" Adele felt a pang of fear. Had Justin been watching her? She should have spoken more cautiously. But there was a lamp now in the mews and she had kept her outside light burning. It would be difficult for anyone to lurk unseen in the mews.

"Never mind," he deflected her question. "Say what you please."

"I'm saying what's true! I'll ask him tonight, if you'll wait and not do anything until we see what he says."

"Why haven't you told him before? You knew I was waiting."

"Because—because——" Adele wanted to hide from Justin the fact that she was not sure of Jan. It was something that she wanted to hide even from herself. Her present decision rested upon hours of hurtful self-questioning and the reopening of all the half-healed wounds of the imperfections of her love for Jan, and his for her. She had always known that she should understand and admire his loyalty to his marriage; just so, equally, she knew that she could not and never would understand why loyalty should mean more to him than love, or her own burning need of him. Adele knew there was a line that summed up Jan's attitude: *'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more'*. The quotation could not comfort her because she did not agree with it. She subsisted, secretly, on her hope that time would prove that Jan's love for her was stronger than his loyalty to his wife. But she feared to put it to the test. If there had been any way by which she could have evaded telling him of Justin's return, she would have done so. But if anything happened and Justin startled Jan with a scandal without her having even tried to warn him, Adele knew that she would be ashamed. Her love for Jan was driving her, at last, to look Justin's threat in the face.

Adele saw that Justin was expecting her to explain her delay. She tried to do so. "I've been making up my mind what was best," she answered as calmly as she could. "For you, as well as for us. I know you're not mean. You're not doing this to hurt me, specially. I do owe you something, I know. But we can do it quietly, like this. And more quickly too. That would help you, wouldn't it?"

"Help me? How?" Justin went over to the table and picked up a couple of bars of the chocolate. He offered one to Adele. When she shook her head, he unwrapped it and began to eat it himself. He added, "I don't trust your help."

"You can trust—him." Adele glowed as she mentioned Jan.

"Not if he's with you. When do you want me to meet him?"

"I don't know. I . . . it's not fixed."

"Where do I meet him?"

"I've told you. It's not settled. I'm asking you."

"You've had a fortnight, and you're still trying to put me off. You can't do it for ever."

"Justin, I had to have time to think! You must see that. It's for your good too."

"Then it's to your greater good."

Adele ignored the interruption. "We can give you what you said you wanted, enough to buy a farm," she explained, "and you won't have to wait . . . the law takes ages. You can have something right away if you need it." Adele glanced round the impoverished room. She thought she had put it tactfully.

Justin regarded Adele for a moment, his jaws working on the chocolate. His expression appeared vacant, but Adele had learned to respect the cold intelligence at the back of it. "Why do you think I'm not mean?" he asked, at length. "I'm as mean as you are. You can't trust me any more than I trust you."

"I do trust you!"

"Don't." Justin broke off another section of chocolate. "It causes me no disturbance at all to upset your life. I've been going back over our past, and I can't find one reason why I should consider you—not one kind word, or action."

"We weren't always unhappy," Adele objected lamely.

"No. You can be very nice when you please. But you didn't please. Neither do I."

"But—I'm not—I'm offering you . . ." Adele suddenly realised that Justin had the advantage over her. What that advantage was, she did not yet know: but he was on top. "What are you getting at?" she asked sharply, forgetting to modulate her approach.

"Wait and see."

"Tell me now."

"Why should I? Why should I waste words? I'm having no more to do with you."

"You've got to!"

"Have I?"

"If you want to get anything out of this! If you go to court you won't win," she threatened. "It's all too long ago, you'll have no right to damages over what's happened lately. The court won't give you anything. You'll have to pay the costs. But we can give you something now. Isn't that what you want?"

"No."

"Then what do you want?"

"I like being mean," Justin answered obscurely. "You've taken what you wanted, the whole of your life, battering your way over the hearts and feelings of those who loved you, and thought you were gentle and sweet as you look. You've never been corrected."

Justin's face looked older, as though the cold resolve that Adele saw in it had been formed in pain and maturity; and she knew that she had hurt him irremediably. It was the face of judgment; and she hated it, blindly, as she hated anything that was too strong for her.

"I'll kill you!" she cried bitterly. "What about the money?"

"Keep it. I've got a job."

"You hate work!"

"You're wrong. I hate some work." Justin walked across to the door. "I've no wish to discuss my character. I heard your views years ago."

"Justin—do listen!"

"I'm sorry." Justin opened the door.

Adele went slowly across to Justin. She could not believe that he was not going to listen to her, or that the plans she had so carefully formulated were going to be frustrated. She still thought that there must be some mistake, that she could put right. Her fear was keeping her brain clear; it was like a wall holding back the heavy rage that was piling up inside her.

"Justin—shut the door." She knew that she could not afford to be angry.

"I will, in a minute." Justin stepped out on to the landing as

though the movement might entice Adele to follow him. He looked back at her as she stood irresolutely in the doorway. "Aren't you going somewhere?" he enquired with cold politeness. "You look like it."

"You know where I'm going."

He shrugged. "Then don't let me keep you. I'm busy writing letters."

"Who to?"

Suspicion flashed from her eyes, and Justin took a step backwards. "Among them," he replied, "will be one to my solicitors concerning Lord Cluer."

Adele felt as though her head would burst. "I'll kill you!" she cried again, and meant it.

Justin took another step backwards. He met her eyes. "Don't be foolish," he said. His hand fluttered along the balustrade and paused nervously. Adele saw that it had found the jagged edge of the wood where the break had occurred and the whole section was weak and splitting.

It was the last thing she saw before the wall of her control went down, and her rage poured through.

Chapter Twenty-Three

JAN WAS DISTURBED because Adele was late for their dinner engagement. She was only a quarter of an hour late and she was never very punctual; but he felt a curious unrest, an indefinable *malaise* that made his back and shoulders ache and his eyes feel strained and tired. He tried to tell himself that his disturbance could have nothing to do with Adele's movements, whatever they were, that he had been working too hard, or was sickening for something; that the cause of the delay was probably that Adele had changed her mind about what she was going to wear. Yet he continued to feel unaccountably ill, as though something had gone gravely wrong with him that he could not explain.

Jan had expected Adele at eight-thirty. Although the restaurant was not one where he had eaten before, he had been

told that it had an additional basement entrance at the back. Wondering whether Adele had mistaken his instructions, he left the small foyer and went quickly through the intimately-lighted restaurant and out by a door at the end of it. He ran down a narrow thickly-carpeted staircase and found himself in a small vestibule where another staircase led up to a revolving door and to the street. The vestibule, softly-lighted and banked with flowers, was empty.

Jan went across to the stationary lift and spoke to the attendant who was sitting within. "Has a lady come in within the last quarter of an hour?" he asked. "A fair young lady?"

"They've been more going out than coming in, sir," the attendant answered, "this lift's for the flats upstairs. There was a few people came in about half an hour ago."

"To the restaurant?"

"To the flats. I took them up. They don't come in to the restaurant much this way, sir."

"You're sure?" Jan insisted. "Would you have noticed?"

"No, sir. I wouldn't be sure. The lady could have come in while I was up."

"Thank-you very much." Jan turned away.

"Excuse me, sir." Jan looked back. He was impatient to get back to the other entrance. The lift-man enquired, "Aren't you Mr. Hegen, sir, that was? Lord Cluer?"

"Yes, I am." Jan forced himself to accept the delay. "Where have I seen you?"

"At the Fifteenth Club, sir. In 'forty-three. You was a member." The man was pleased with himself. "I knew your face at once. I don't seem able to forget a face."

"Have you been here long?" Jan enquired politely.

"Three months. With the demob, the Fifteenth wanted someone younger and smarter than me. But this suits me better."

"Good."

"What time was the young lady due, sir?"

"Half-past eight."

"Twenty minutes don't mean much to a lady, sir. Have you tried round the other side?"

"I'm going back there now. Well—good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

When Jan got back, Adele was sitting in the crowded foyer. It crossed his mind that she was sitting back on the soft couch as though she had been there some time, although he knew she had not. She saw him coming and turned to him an expression of such longing intensity that he was startled. He went to her, feeling sure now that something was amiss.

"Did you come in from the back?" she asked him quickly.

Now that she was here, Jan no longer cared what time it was. She was always late. He sat down beside her and took her hand. "Darling, you don't look at all well," he asked her, "are you all right?" He thought that her pallor was like a mask. He tried, but he could read nothing beyond it, almost as though she did not intend him to read anything. "The baby?" he asked, with a catch at his heart.

"He's fine, darling. There's nothing wrong with him. I'm not feeling too well," Adele answered. "I've got a really awful headache." Her fingers tightened on Jan's as she spoke.

"It's strange. So have I. At least, I feel generally low," he attempted to joke. "Perhaps we've caught something?"

Adele's eyes, wide and mute, met Jan's and he sensed again that something had happened to her that she would like to but could not explain to him. The skin under her eyes appeared thin, which was always a sign that she was upset. "Something has happened," he said acutely. "You look bad. What is it?"

Adele was silent for several moments. Jan again felt a wave of longing that seemed to surge from her towards him as though she must tell him something. But the wave dragged her away from him powerfully, and she remained silent. He attempted instead to probe her expression. "What have you been doing? Since this afternoon?"

"What I said I'd do," her voice was faint. "I fed our Jan, and Mrs. Willis came."—Mrs. Willis was the baby-sitter, a childless widow of unimpeachable references. Adele continued, "Then I dressed and came here."

"You haven't told me everything . . ."

"No. I haven't." Adele's head jerked upwards. She looked Jan full in the face. "Darling. I can't. Something did happen. I should have told you before. Now, there isn't time."

"How do you mean, there isn't time? Tell me in a few words."

For a moment it seemed as though she would tell him. Jan's heart seemed to hang in the balance. When the tension left her and her eyes dropped from his, he knew that her trust in him was not absolute. His hope of her confidence was displaced by a leaden despair.

"I must go home," she whispered.

"I'll take you. The table isn't booked. Let's go."

"No!" she cried sharply. "You mustn't come with me! I'll take a taxi."

"You won't. I'm coming with you."

"The police may be there." The statement was driven from her. "They'll question you if you come. The whole thing'll come out about us, our Jan, everything. You mustn't come!"

Adele stood up hurriedly. Her glance went round the foyer in a hunted manner, but no one was paying them any attention.

Jan stood up with Adele. Momentarily, he foresaw the consequences of any police enquiry, the remorseless siege of the news-hounds, directed against the most secret defences of his life, and Adele's—and Lorely's. He felt Adele's hand on his arm, and heard her voice, now as gentle as a mother's.

"Jan, I won't let them find out. Don't worry. I'll tell you, one day."

Adele turned and went swiftly towards the door. Jan followed her. "Adele!" he tried to call her back, but she took no notice.

A taxi had drawn up outside the restaurant and a man was paying the driver. Adele ran towards the taxi and got into it. She waited for Jan to come up and spoke to him before she closed the door.

"Ring me early tomorrow, darling. And love me."

In the taxi, Adele tried to shut from her mind the memory of Jan as he stood on the pavement outside the restaurant watching

her drive away. She had twisted to catch a last glimpse of him through the little window at the back of the taxi but the blind had been down. Her Jan, and she had left him standing there alone; she was being carried away from him into the darkening damp spring night. It was raining slightly and she could see the pavements beginning to glisten under the lamps. The taxi swerved across Park Lane and turned down East Carriage Road towards Victoria. In the distance, between the shadowy trees of Hyde Park, she could see the outer circlet of lamps, lemon-yellow, lonely and glimmering. She closed her eyes against this glimpse of the outside world and felt that this unlighted moving box of the taxi contained all that was left of her life; her own self, her secrets, her obscure future. She sat forward on the edge of the seat, tensely, willing the taxi to go faster. She was obsessed with the need for speed, to get home as quickly as possible, to get rid of Mrs. Willis and find herself alone and prepared for the next ordeal, whatever that might be.

It was some minutes after ten, when the door-bell rang. Mrs. Willis had gone home. Adele had given the baby his ten o'clock feed and settled him for the night. In the hope of achieving at least the semblance of poise, she put on again the clinging silvery dress she had been wearing and, with shaking knees, went down to answer the door.

Outside in the rain, Adele could see the police car. Her instinct to preserve herself, Jan, and her child from harm, drove the confusion and grief from her mind and left an awful clarity. The old wooden staircase trembled under the weight of the two men who followed her upstairs, and she thought with detachment that it was a good thing that the inspector was a big man so that she could take refuge in her own smallness and apparent frailty.

In the light from the gold lamp Adele saw that Inspector Cook was a beefy, middle-aged man in a navy chalk-striped suit. His rubicund face and balding head glistened with a faint sweat. He took some papers from an inner pocket and regarded her temperately.

"Are you Mrs. Adele Forrest?"

'Yes.'

"Is your husband, Justin Forrest, of 19, Notley Chambers, Chelsea?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see your husband, Mrs. Forrest?"

"I saw him this evening."

"You did? Where did you see him?"

"At his flat. In Chelsea."

"What time did you leave him?"

"It was ten-past eight."

"Are you sure of the time? It wasn't nearer eight or eight-thirty?"

"I know it was ten past. I was in a hurry to keep an appointment at half-past."

"Does it surprise you, Mrs. Forrest, to hear that your husband is dead?"

Adele attempted a gasp of surprise and her hand went to her mouth. The sound was as weak as the cluck of a dying chicken. "But that's impossible! I only left him a little while ago. He can't be dead! When did he die?"

"I'm afraid he died about two hours ago. He appeared to have fallen from the landing outside his flat into the well of the block. He was killed immediately. He broke his neck."

"But it's dreadful! He broke his neck." Adele repeated the words with a sense of shock.

"As his next of kin, Mrs. Forrest, I'm afraid I must ask if you will accompany me to identify the body."

As Adele drew near to the austere bier on which lay the sheet-draped mortal remains of Justin, she had to fight back an inward superstitious panic greater than any she had experienced during the previous panic-filled hours. She had seen many dead bodies, but the fact did not prepare her for the sight of Justin now. But as the mortuary attendant drew back the sheet from the partly bandaged face and Adele steeled herself to look upon it, she was shaken by a sudden flooding relief that Justin himself had gone, thus irrevocably, from this flesh that had housed him. Wherever he was, he was not here to accuse her. A block of wood was more alive than this decaying clay. For the first time,

Adele realised that Justin had gone finally from her life. . . .

Back at the flat, Adele's steely control began to weaken. The inspector was still here. She felt his will, braced against hers in his determination to break down the defences of her story and of her private life. Hers was a simple story: Adele felt that if she adhered to it, no one could prove whether it was truthful or not. But she did not yet know how much the inspector already knew about her, or how he had traced her so quickly. Perhaps he knew, also, about Jan?

The inspector sat back in his easy chair, and crossed his knees. Having requested Adele to sit comfortably he was doing the same thing himself. Adele sat with a straight back in the chair facing him and wished she could achieve the same appearance of composure. She could hear the sergeant prowling about the flat and she kept wondering if there was anything visible of Jan's that should be hidden away. She dared not relax. She folded one hand tightly over the other in her lap: hands gave you away and she was determined to keep hers under control. The inspector was not fidgeting at all, he was not smoking, he had not even a note-book handy. Even his eyes were passive, resting calmly but unwaveringly upon herself.

"Were you living with your husband, Mrs. Forrest?" He spoke pleasantly and sympathetically.

"No, we were separated."

"Legally?"

"No."

"When did you separate?"

"It was in nineteen-thirty-eight."

"He left you?"

"I left him."

"Any children?"

"No." Adele caught her breath. There was no sound from the room where the baby lay asleep.

"Were you, then, on bad terms with your husband?"

"I'd nothing to do with him, really. I hadn't seen him since . . . since we parted."

"You say you were with him tonight. Why was that?" As

Adele hesitated, the inspector added, "Was he expecting you?"

"No . . . no, he wasn't."

"What was the reason of your seeing him?"

"He was pestering me."

"What about?"

"It's a long story."

"I've plenty of time."

Adele thought desperately. She knew that if the police persisted in their enquiries, they must find out that she was living with another man, by whom she had a child. Even then, she might still keep Jan's name from coming into it, if she had warned him in time. She knew that all their mutual and business transactions had been signed by Jan in Justin's name. Jan gave her money in cash, and Adele signed the cheques. Jan himself had left nothing to chance. If Adele could succeed in satisfying the police that she had nothing to do with Justin's death they might yet leave her alone, and Jan would be safe. Her moral life, after all, was not their affair. It was worth trying.

Adele sighed and answered the inspector. "My husband wanted me to go back to him." As she spoke, she knew intuitively that she had made a mistake. She should have spoken the truth. Whatever she left out, the things she said should be true, as they had been so far. Then no one could accuse her of anything.

With a cold heart, she saw the inspector draw from his inside jacket pocket some papers from which he extracted a letter. He held it up, and Adele saw that it was addressed in Justin's handwriting and that it had been neatly slit open.

"This letter was found on your husband's body," the inspector said. "It's addressed to you, and stamped, but not posted. Were you expecting a letter from him?"

"May I see it?" Adele's hand went out towards the letter but it slid smoothly away from her, back into the inspector's pocket.

"In a moment. Have you any idea what it might be about?"

Adele was silent. She knew the probable subject of the letter only too well. Had Justin mentioned Jan by name? She could think of nothing to say that would not lead her

further into trouble. "No," she answered finally, "not really."

"You must have some idea? You'd been corresponding."

"My husband was jealous of me," she allowed.

The inspector glanced round the room. "Do you live in this flat alone?"

"I live here with my baby!" Adele brought it out defiantly.

"Oh, you've got a baby?" The inspector pursed his lips with a kind of fatherly concern. He asked, without criticism, "Your husband's not the father of the child, is he?"

"No."

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me who is?"

"I can't tell you." Adele thought, 'He wasn't surprised, he knew about the baby, in another moment, he'll bring out Jan's name. Why didn't I tell Jan, in the beginning?' Adele longed to be dead but she remained painfully, acutely alive.

"The child's father's still in your life? He hasn't gone away?"

"No."

"Why can't you tell me his name?"

"I'd rather not."

"What was your husband's attitude towards this other man?"

"I don't know how he felt."

"Were you on reasonably friendly terms with your husband? When you were with him this evening, what was his attitude towards you?"

"He was quiet."

"Did he ask you to go back to him?"

"I think he knew I wouldn't."

"Then why was he pestering you?"

"He wanted money."

"From you or your lover?"

"I don't think he cared."

"Then if you went to see him because he was pestering you for money, did you not have some sort of argument?"

"It was more a discussion. We didn't have a row."

"Did he threaten you, or become violent?"

"No."

"Did you have a struggle with him? Was there an accident?"

"No."

The inspector paused. Adele noticed again how motionless he was. She could almost see his agile thoughts scurrying hither and thither, rounding up the things she had said: that she had already half forgotten. She was finding it hard now to remember where she had lied and where she had spoken the truth.

The inspector resumed his questioning. "Where was your husband when you left him this evening?"

"He was in the flat."

"And the time was?"

"Ten-past eight. I looked at my watch."

"And you weren't out on the landing with him? If I may say so, madam, if you were involved in a struggle with your husband and there was an accident, it would be far better for you to say so. . . ."

"There wasn't anything like that." Adele dared not go back on what she had said. She sensed the withdrawal of the inspector's momentary sympathy.

"The doctor who examined your husband states that he died at approximately eight-thirty. . . ." The inspector seemed to be measuring out his words. "The fact that you say you were with him this evening very close to that time, suggests to me that you know something about his death?"

"I don't. I left before."

"Where were you at eight-thirty?"

"I was meeting a friend in the West End."

"Have you a witness?"

"No. I took a taxi. I don't suppose anyone noticed me."

"Where did you go?"

"To a restaurant."

"What was the name of it?"

Adele hesitated. Jan did not know what time she got to the restaurant, she thought. But someone might have observed her. Besides, Jan might be known there. "I can't tell you," she answered.

"You're implying, then, that what you're saying is not true: that you did not go to any restaurant at eight-thirty to-night, or

at any other hour. Or that, if you did, you got to this restaurant much later than eight-thirty?"

"I didn't. But I'm sorry, I can't tell you about it."

"You realise that you're not giving me a very favourable impression of your movements this evening? Who were you meeting at this restaurant?"

Adele was silent. She knew it to be unreasonable, but she felt safer when she said nothing.

For the first time since he showed her Justin's letter, the inspector made a definite movement. He uncrossed his knees and leaned towards Adele. She was aware that, although he did not show it, his patience was beginning to wear thin. She knew she was obstructing him. But what else could she do?

"Were you meeting this other man? Who is he?"

Adele clung to her secret. "He's a professional man, and I don't want to involve him in anything to do with this. He doesn't come into it."

"Is he married?"

"Yes, he's married." Adele thought that now, surely, if the inspector knew Jan's name, he would use it against her, as he had used Justin's letter. . . . But the inspector gave her no clue as to whether he knew it or not.

"You are saying, then, that you have a liaison with a married man which was the subject of an argument between yourself and your husband? Following which argument, or discussion, your husband is now dead. It seems to me, Mrs. Forrest, that you had a very good reason for wishing your husband out of the way."

"I hadn't! I never wished him ill, he was out of my way."

"I'm not at all satisfied with what you've told me." The inspector took out a note-book. "And I shall make some enquiries. I must ask you to remain at this address. If you are obliged to go away, please get in touch with me and let me know where I can find you." The inspector jotted down a name and a telephone number and tore out the page and gave it to Adele. He reached economically for his hat which was on the floor beside him, and stood up. "Good-night, Mrs. Forrest."

The police had gone. But Adele knew now that they would come back. 'Stay here,' they had said. Where could she run to? Wherever she went, they would bring her back. It would make matters worse.

Adele wandered into the kitchen and sat down on a wooden chair. She scarcely knew where she was. When would they come back? Hardly before the morning. She had the night.

She could not imagine going to bed. She would keep watch, keep thinking.

If they came back, they might take her away for more questioning, they might search the flat. Adele's eyes passed dully across the bright kitchen. On the shelf above the sink there was a photograph of herself and Jan taken by some willing stranger on a day they had spent in the country. The flat was full of evidence that would have given away Jan unless she destroyed it. There was time for that.

It broke Adele's heart to tear up the little snap. She knew she must destroy the negative, too. She went into the sitting-room, taking the frame with her. She put the frame away in a drawer in her desk and took out the packets of snaps they had taken, and the negatives. There were papers, receipts, letters, she would have to go through them all. There were Justin's letters, too, they must go.

She went through other drawers and cupboards in her bedroom and in the studio, and through her suitcases, and her handbags. The pile of odds and ends on her desk when she finally got down to it, was considerable.

It seemed as though her mind was doing two things at once. One part of her was keeping a sharp watch on the papers, setting aside some of them for destruction and putting away others to look as though they had not been disturbed. The other part of her was going back over her life, as far back as her childhood, retrieving fragments, pages of her history; and tearing them apart, or setting them aside for further thought.

'When I was a little girl,' she thought relentlessly, 'I knew something was going to happen to me. This must have been it. It wasn't the torture, or the camp. It was Jan. People hurt more

than things. Nothing hurts like love. If I'd told Jan about Justin, this wouldn't have happened. But I couldn't tell him. If he'd changed, it would have killed me. There's a look in him sometimes, it makes me think I don't know him, sometimes I think he could hate me as much as he loves me, if I hurt his wife. He must love her, he doesn't know it, but I do. I wish I'd killed her! I mustn't think of it, but he'd be free, she binds him, she makes him suffer with her weak, useless clinging and she doesn't care, she's killing him and killing me.

'He could break away, he's mine, and he should! But he won't. This is turning me bad, driving me away from him. Why can't I trust him? Why is love so near to hate? I love him, I proved it, I gave him his son. All that pain. When Justin fell, the whole building shook, he must have been heavy. Jan wouldn't understand. He doesn't know what it's like to meet your enemy. It's like coming face to face with death. You've got to live.'

The waste-paper basket was half-full of torn papers. Wondering whether there was any hiding place that she had overlooked, Adele resisted the impulse to rush about wildly, looking; if she once let go, she would become like an animal in an earthquake, scattering blindly as the ground began to crumble.

There was still much to be done. There were Jan's clothes in the wardrobe, she went through the pockets, but found only some silver, a few unimportant keys, a couple of crumpled handkerchiefs, and the half of a theatre ticket. There was the big portrait of Jan by the bed: if she got out of all this, the studio would still have the negative. She took it from its frame and tore it across resolutely.

There was only one thing left, the head of Jan in the niche by the fireplace in the sitting-room. Adele had left it to the last because, in her heart, she did not know if she could bring herself to destroy it.

Adele went to the head and looked at it. The clear widely-set eyes with their expression of slightly sad resolve, seemed to be looking past her almost as though they had turned away from her. She realised that when she modelled Jan, she hardly knew him; and that those steadfast eyes had been turned towards a

destiny of which neither of them dreamed, although it was then already in the making. For an instant, Adele wondered with remorse what grief she might be about to bring upon Jan in the days to come? He had shown her such infinite kindness . . . as though it were yesterday, she could see the first hamper he brought her, and the burgundy in the white kitchen cup. . . . She had wronged him. She should have told him everything. Jan wouldn't have let her go to see Justin alone.

Someone might recognise the head. But only someone who knew Jan; and the police would have to find that person, first. It did not seem too big a risk. For the time being, Adele left the model where it was.

She carried the waste-paper basket into the kitchen. She took out the ash-can, emptied out the contents on to a newspaper and dried out the can. Then she stuffed the torn papers and photographs into the can, poured over them some lighter petrol, and set a match to it. All this she had been planning. When she had finished, even the charred ashes had been washed down the sink and all appeared as before. By the morning the smell, too, would have evaporated.

Little Jan was sleeping profoundly. Adele bent over him as he lay in his tiny undisturbed world and pondered, as she had done many times before, that he seemed to be hardly a part of herself at all. He was heavy, peaceful and, she was sure, acute of perception. In these things, he was Jan's son. Jan's mind was so clear, few things seemed to disturb him. She, Adele, appeared to have bequeathed to her child none of her own violent, unbearable emotions. From the first moment that he lay in her arms, little Jan had seemed a stranger to her, and he seemed so now that he lay sleeping peacefully amidst this stormy sequel to his birth. His tranquillity was unnatural, in a way. He would have seemed more real to her if he had yelled and she could have comforted him. If only he could arouse some feeling in her! She knew she did not share the passion with which Jan looked at his son or gathered him up in his loving, clumsy, helpless hands. Jan would need a dozen children before he learned to put a diaper on a baby; but he would give his son a love that the child's own mother might envy.

Sometimes Adele had dared to hope that Jan loved the child so much he would be unable to bear to see so little of him . . . that the time was coming when Jan's love for the baby would triumph and he would tell his wife what had happened. Then, perhaps, Adele would discover her love for her child, and feel that the agony of his birth had been worth while. Now, he was merely a part of her primitive intention to keep the outside world from wrecking her private schemes.

With the lightest of fingers, Adele drew the covers about the sleeping baby. 'We'll think of something,' she promised him silently, 'we'll come through.'

At last, Adele went to bed. At least, she undressed and lay down in the darkness. Three times in her life she had come right up against it; the first time, when she knew she had to get away from Justin, after two years of marriage, the second, when she had known they were going to torture her. And now. . . . But she was not yet defeated. In a few days the police might leave her alone. There would be an inquest, Justin would be safely buried, and she would find herself here in this bed with Jan, able to tell him, well, not everything, but of how tonight she had tried to save his name.

Adele did not believe she would get off so easily. What had Justin said to her in his letter? Everyone would know except herself. But she would go on fighting. . . .

Awake, she lay there: an animal at bay, not against what life had done to her; but against what she herself had done to life.

At eight o'clock, the phone rang. Adele was up and dressed. Towards the small hours, she had drifted into an exhausted sleep from which she was awakened only by the baby's hungry crying at six o'clock. She seemed to have opened her eyes to a changed world where she herself had become a new person; hardened, battened down against any emotion or thought that might cloud or confuse her in the hours to come. But the sound of Jan's voice on the phone went right through her. It tore her apart and left her weak with longing to tell him everything and end the lonely self-sufficiency that she had imposed upon herself. She

had never been separated from him like this. Why had she done this to herself?

"Are you all right, my love?" she caught the distraction in his tone. "I nearly came over."

"You mustn't!"

"I couldn't sleep, what is it that's happened?"

"Oh, darling, it's in this morning's papers. Just a few lines. . . ."

"What is?"

"You'll see. I'm sorry, darling. You'll never forgive me. I ought to have told you. The police have been questioning me."

"But what about? Why don't you tell me?"

"It'll get into the papers. About you and me."

"But, my darling, if something's happened, if you're in trouble, it's for me to know! Your troubles are mine."

"This one isn't."

"I don't understand. Is it something you've done?"

"I can't tell you! It's too late."

"You keep saying that! You know, nothing you've done would make any difference to me. I always love you. You surely don't think that . . . that I . . ."

"I will tell you, darling, when there's time. But it'll take so long. And time is short. I know it! Jan, you mustn't come to this flat! Stay away for a few days. Read the papers, see what you think."

"My love, you're torturing me! I must know what this is about."

"You'll know. Oh, you'll know. . . ." Adele broke off. From where she was standing in the sitting-room, she saw the police cars slide into the mews. "Jan . . ." she continued hurriedly, "I can't say anything more now. Darling, you must wait. You must be patient. I know you love me. I believe it! I do! But—don't come! It's for your sake. for our love." Adele replaced the receiver softly.

On its niche, the plaster head of Jan continued to gaze serenely away from Adele. She went to the model and picked it

up and brought it back to the fireplace. Closing her eyes, she lifted it and dashed it into the hearth.

Chapter Twenty-Four

THE MANNEQUIN CAME OUT ON TO THE GREY-CARPETED DAIS, paused, turned to this way and to that, and flowed rather than walked down the shallow stairs and across the crowded salon. In the gauzy fabric that veiled the midnight satin of her dress a few hidden spangles glanced like stars. Behind her trailed a floating pennant like a cloud. There was a star on one bare shoulder and another in her hair. The title of the creation was 'Summer Night'.

Lorely touched Jan's arm. "That one," she whispered decisively, "in spangled white ninon above a gold foundation." Lorely could be ruthlessly practical when it came to details. "With a gold cape for the theatre," she added, "cut with straight fronts and a sway back. And a stand-up collar. No stars. Gold dust——" Lorely touched what showed of her hair-line under the smart spring hat, "here," she said.

Jan attempted to relax his stony features into an expression of interest. He nodded. "Very nice."

"It'll stand out. The gold. That's the main thing. For the first night."

"We may not want to stand out."

"Of course we shall! You'll make a speech. And the white and gold will go with the room afterwards."

"If it's ready in time."

"It'll be ready. It's four months yet."

Lorely turned to consult her programme, and Jan considered with cold surprise the fact that, with the numbing mystery of Adele's conduct in the past few hours, he was yet able to sit in this overheated perfumed place and make rational conversation. He felt like a mortally wounded man who finds he is able to ask for and smoke a cigarette, and he wondered how long it would be before he could make a move to find out something more. In

another half-hour, he considered, they might bring tea and he could slip out and get the early editions.

Jan stood on the pavement outside the Savile Row police station and searched through the evening papers. A brief paragraph in the stop press of each of them gave the information that Adele had been arrested for the murder of her husband, Justin Forrest, and had been remanded in custody. None of the papers told Jan anything more.

Jan had a feeling he'd gone mad and that if anyone looked at him now he, too, would be arrested. He turned and stared unseeingly at a police notice on the wall of the building.

It had not been true that Adele's husband was dead. Until yesterday, he had been alive, yet Adele had never told Jan. Even if Adele had thought he was dead, she had known yesterday that he wasn't, but she had kept it to herself. She had not told Jan in the restaurant last night, or in the night that followed, or on the phone this morning. Why? Had she something to hide, something so serious that she could not tell even Jan, who loved her, from whom Jan thought she had never hidden anything? Had she, in truth, something to do with Justin's death, was that why she was late the evening before, why she'd seemed so changed?

Jan knew that Adele would be in Holloway prison now. She would have taken the baby with her. The police must have a case against her. Whatever had taken place, she had been charged, she would probably be tried. She was in prison now Adele, who feared prisons, in a cell . . . no, she was a mother, she would be in the prison hospital; but she was there, caged, unable to get out, to tell him about it.

What was Adele doing with this husband, with Justin? He had been found in the well of a block of flats, the papers said, he might have been pushed, stabbed, shot, he might have attacked Adele and fallen. The story would not come out until she was brought before the police court. Then there would be another remand. It might be a week, two weeks, three weeks, before Jan knew the story. . . .

Before Jan knew Adele's own story of what had happened.

'Twenty minutes don't mean much to a lady, sir.' It was the voice of

the liftman at the restaurant where Jan had waited for Adele. What did those twenty minutes mean to Adele? They might mean nothing. Or, upon them, might rest Adele's life. Until Jan knew whether those twenty minutes mattered, was he not a potential witness for the Crown? If he were brought into the case, he would have to give evidence. The liftman had recognised him. There was no possibility of Jan's explaining away those twenty minutes. Was that why Adele had wanted Jan to keep away?

But Adele didn't know about the liftman. Was she thinking then of Lorely, of the publicity that would flare up from the first whisper of Jan's association with the case?

Lorely, now planning her dresses, her home, her future in placid security for the months ahead. Jan dared not think about Lorely now. Jan's place was with Adele and his son, in their trouble. If he took that place, Lorely would have no home, no future with Jan. . . .

'I can't seem to forget a face.' The liftman would come forward, officious and helpful. Between them, he and Jan might hang Adele.

Jan turned away from the police notice and looked up and down the unfrequented street. He couldn't get into the car and dash to Holloway. A few yards away, Lorely was waiting for him to drive her home. Jan might evade that, but he couldn't evade the blaze of publicity that would grow from his sudden appearance at Holloway as Adele's lover, the father of her son, the man in the case: the questions, the evidence of the liftman.

It was possible, though not hopeful, that if Jan did not come forward he would not be traced. Perhaps that was what Adele meant? She was trying to keep his name out of it? Did she really believe that, at a time like this, he would stay away from her? What had he done to her, that she should think that?

But he would have to stay away, until he knew the facts of the case. He could write but, even in a letter, he could not explain. What would Adele think of him, for not coming?

Jan turned and walked back to the salon.

It had been a hot day and it was a warm and sunny evening. It seemed that summer had come. Jan drove up Park Lane. It was five o'clock. He had left Lorely in a state of happy exhaustion, stretched out on her white velvet couch in an old tea gown, with the latest copy of *Vogue*. She would not give him a thought until dinner time; and by then Jan would have phoned a message to say he would not be back to dinner.

Jan did not know where he was going. It did not matter, so long as he could keep moving and no one could speak to him. He was still wearing the formal dark suit he wore to the dress show. He should have changed, but his only thought had been to get away from the house. Away from it, he felt nearer Adele.

Jan drove until he came to a quiet street at the back of Paddington. There he stopped the car. He took a note-pad from his pocket and began his letter:

'My beloved Adele,' he wrote, 'I have seen the papers, with the dreadful news of what has happened. I long to be with you—longing is a mild term to express the torment of my thoughts, and my desire to see you, and to hear from your own lips what you have been through to be situated as you are now. Nothing in life would have kept me from you—but there is one thing that prevents me, that I cannot explain. I hope it will not be for long, and then I will be able to come to you. In the meantime, I understand now, that it may be for your good—and *yours alone*—that my name does not emerge yet.

'But, my darling, my own dear love, why did you not tell me what was happening while I was there, and there was yet time? You kept saying "there wasn't time". I dare not say much, but you will know my grief that you should ever have wished to keep anything from me in the past. I feel it is my fault, and that you tried to take on yourself a burden that should have been mine. I must have failed you, in that you may have thought that there was any trouble in life of yours that I would not wish to share. I love you, and my heart is with you, and our baby, all the time.

'I know that I shall be denied even a word from you, since everything that you write, and I write, will be censored. Only

THE ENEMY

the papers are left to me—those destroyers of human rights and happiness. And now they are my life-line!

‘Forgive me, my love, if I am bewildered and confused, and can say no more now.

‘With all my love, and my prayers,

‘Your own,
‘J.’

Jan posted his letter at a near-by pillar-box and went back to the car. There seemed to be nothing in life for him to do. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past six. He tried to picture Adele, but could not. He had never been inside a prison. Would she be with the baby in a hospital ward? Would he be beside her, in his cot? Or would they have taken him away from Adele for the night? Jan thought of the cot in the mews, lying empty. He would have gone there, just to stand beside it, to touch something that had been Adele’s; but he was sure that the flat would be guarded, if not full of detectives.

Suppose Adele had killed her husband? Suppose she were guilty? In that case, Jan himself could have killed Justin now: for what Justin must have done to provoke Adele to such desperation.

But she could not be guilty! The thought was insupportable. What would become of the child?

If anything happened to Adele, Jan would be there to take care of the boy. But if Jan himself died: it was a violent world and there were unforeseen risks. Who would then look after Jan’s son? He was provided for under Jan’s will, the family would take him, he would not be an outcast. But the story of his birth would remain closed. He would never know anything of his mother, or his father, or their story.

Someone else should know. Jan felt the load of his responsibility to be something that he had no right to be carrying alone. Not now.

Whom could Jan tell? Everett would offer practical sympathy, but would think Jan a fool; and Everett was jealous for his sons. Jan’s lawyer? He was a hard man, and Jan did not trust him. To

unload your follies on your friends was like asking them for a heavy loan without security. Jan had no friend to whom he could talk about Adele.

Lorely? Lorely was always willing to understand anything. Perhaps it was merciful that she could understand so little. Lorely would have to know some day, but not till Jan himself understood many things about their marriage that he had not yet faced or thought about.

There was Nanny. Nanny never had any doubts about what was right and what was wrong. According to Nanny's law, if you did the wrong thing, you paid, and were punished. But nothing that anyone did would surprise Nanny. Jan could tell Nanny about Adele, and she would leave God to do the condemning. . . .

Jan thundered the knocker on Nanny's door. Even then he was afraid she would not hear. He listened, and thought he heard a faint sound within. He banged again with all his strength, and the noise he made reproached him in the quietness of what was little more than a village street, fifteen miles from the centre of London.

Jan felt that he had made his last effort in coming here, and that he would break down the door, or wait all night, rather than go away without seeing Nanny. The villa was the last in the yellow brick slate-porched terrace. Jan walked round the side of it. At the back was a tiny conservatory. The door of this was open. Jan stepped inside.

Nanny was ironing in the sunny sitting-room that opened from the conservatory; smoothing away indefatigably before an old deal table, her cheeks flaming, her thoughts in faraway places. She replaced the iron in the rest with the faint click that Jan had heard, and looked up as his shadow fell across the sun. "Mr. Jan!" she cried. Her cheeks swelled into jolly knobbles. "Why, I am pleased to see you! Were you passing, then?"

Jan went to her and embraced her heartily. Just to see her, gave him a feeling of warmth and security. He loved her country-woman's face with its shiny pink cheeks and canny

deep-set eyes. She had no features that you could remember or describe; and she was very plump, in fact, shapeless. She was a force rather than a form, a reassuring atmosphere encompassing all the practical realities of life.

"I wanted to see you," Jan answered. "Is it very inconvenient? You're busy?"

"Why no, Mr. Jan! I'm as pleased as can be!" Nanny's hand moved across the front of her jumper as she spoke and Jan saw that she was wearing a hearing aid. "Do sit down . . ." she encouraged him. "And let me get you something? Have you had anything to eat? A glass of sherry?"

"I don't want to eat, thank-you," Jan forgot to lower his voice. "But I'd like the sherry."

"If you'd shouted at me like that, forty years ago," she admonished him, "you wouldn't have got anything! I remember, I used to sit listening to you on the tennis court when I was in the schoolroom. I could now, with this."

"I'm sorry. I see I'll have to be careful. Is it so good?"

"Ah, nobody says anything behind my back nowadays! Not when I'm listening-in. . . ." Nanny broke off and swept a pile of ironed linen into a basket. "I say this to you, Mr. Jan, I don't tell everyone. But when you can choose between what you want to hear, and what you don't, you'll be a happy man." Nanny hustled the linen out of the room.

Jan sat down in one of the roomy arm-chairs. Its chintz cover, bleached by sun and innumerable launderings, had no definable colour or pattern. Like Nanny herself, the room was small, cosy and shiny and comfortable. Jan glanced up as she set a jug of water, a glass, and a bottle on the table at his side. It was not sherry. It was brandy.

She knew something was wrong.

She sat down opposite him and took a bag of mending into her lap. "What brings you all out here, Jan?" she asked. She was not looking at him. She was examining a hole in a child's sock.

Jan took his time. He had eaten nothing all day and the brandy was making him feel that, whatever he said, he had

nothing to lose. He reminded himself that confession was no shock to the penitent. It was the listener who had to be considered.

"I've got something to tell you," he began.

"Tell me." Nanny was threading a needle.

"Nanny—would it be a great shock to you to hear that I have a son?"

Nanny laid down her work. "A son? How old?"

"Three months. . . ."

"But—Mrs. Lorely?"

Jan shook his head. "She doesn't know. No one knows. Only yourself. His mother was a girl I came across in a concentration camp when I was writing it up a couple of years ago. She'd had a bad time, and when she came home she found her parents had been killed in an air-raid. She had no one belonging to her, no friends, she was ill."

"Has she . . . passed on?"

"She's in prison on a charge of murder. With the baby."

"In prison for murder?" Nanny repeated uncomprehendingly.

"Did she—kill someone?"

"I'm sure not. But, Nanny, I don't know, I don't know a thing about it! I can't find out without, perhaps, doing her more harm than good. I'll tell you about that. I can't get in touch with her, see her, see my baby."

"Can't you go and see her in prison?"

"I daren't. I'll explain. Adele had a husband. I think she must have married him before the war. I—don't think she'd seen him since. Last night he was found dead. The papers say he'd fallen into the well of the flats where he lived. The police have arrested Adele. They must have reasons, she must have been with him, but I didn't know. I didn't even know he was alive. It's possible that Adele herself thought he was dead. I met Adele last night, somewhere in the West End. She was very late. I didn't ask why. While I was waiting for her, someone saw me and recognised me. If Adele was late because she was with her husband, someone is a witness to that fact beside myself. If I come forward, I shall be forced to say that she was late."

"But she *was* late. You've said that."

"But I don't know *why* she was late! It may not matter. But it could be her defence."

"Perhaps she did kill him? The husband? If she didn't, why can't she say she was late? If she's innocent?"

"I'm sure she's innocent. But I think something happened, there was a struggle, or an accident, something that she's trying to hide. She's making a mistake! She's thinking that she can deal with it by herself. She's trying to protect me, Nanny! My name."

"But you didn't kill him. . . ."

"I mean Lorely—the publicity. We took our happiness, Adele and I. We took it selfishly. But Lorely was never to know. I know Adele tried to save me from scandal, because of Lorely."

"Poor Mrs. Lorely. She wanted a son. . . ." Nanny's eyes had lost their canny brightness. In Nanny's rosy face, her eyes looked lost, pitiful and bewildered for the tragedy of another woman. Nanny had wanted babies, too. And Nanny had believed in Jan. She had washed and clothed, scolded and loved him, raised him to a rewarding manhood. He was her pride. In Nanny's eyes, Jan saw himself topple: no longer perfect, but human, and a sinner. And he wondered if he had said too much?

"She idolised you, didn't she?" Nanny's face trembled.

"I never meant her to know. I thought she was safe. I was never going to leave her."

"Will you leave her now?"

"If I thought that all this could be got through," Jan answered slowly, "if it were not for the papers, if I thought I could keep it from Lorely, I would." Jan concluded bitterly, "but I'm news."

"Will the papers find out, do you think?"

"Dear, there's going to be a murder trial, a woman with a young baby, a dead husband, an unknown lover. Can you imagine that the papers won't get my name, whether Adele tries to hide it or not? It's where my own money comes from—from news about people like me."

"It'll be in the papers? A scandal, about our family?"

"I'm afraid so. I can't consider the family now."

"Poor Mrs. Lorely," Nanny said again. "Poor lady. What will she do?"

What would Lorely do? Lorely's future loomed before Jan, chaotic and insoluble. What would become of any of them, himself, Adele, Lorely?

"Don't you love her?" Nanny's old eyes were not accusing Jan. They were troubled, grieved—for Jan's own grief and trouble. Nanny did not know anything about the law, the conflicts of love, or the passions that lead to murder. But she knew Jan.

"What is love?" Jan was asking himself.

"You've been together a long time. Near on twenty years, isn't it?"

"Seventeen." As Nanny said, it was a long time.

"It's a lot of years to give. A long service, if it comes to nothing. Will there be a divorce, you think?"

"If this comes out." Jan could no longer evade it.

"I shan't like to think of Mrs. Lorely by herself. I would never have thought that you, no one would have thought . . ." Nanny refrained loyally from voicing the reproach and waited dumbly for Jan's explanation.

"We weren't suited." For the sake of Nanny's distress, Jan tried to explain, although he hardly knew the explanation himself. "I found out quite soon. Lorely still can't understand. We didn't know each other when we married. We disappointed each other's hopes. We made the best out of what was left, home, family, being used to each other. I suppose, really, we made something out of nothing but a hope, that failed. All there was left was loyalty, a kind of gratitude."

"But, if you're grateful to each other. After seventeen years. And then to say you've failed."

"I've failed." It was a relief, at last, to admit it. "Lorely loves me, Nanny. Whatever I do, or don't do. Whatever I am. She can't reason or criticise. She can't judge. She loves me like a peasant loves his land, because I belong to her."

"What will she do without you?"

"I don't know." Jan felt a sudden, inconsolable despair. Glancing up, he saw in Nanny's face an expression of cognition.

"I believe you love her?"

"I do . . ." Jan had not known it till this moment. "But I also love Adele."

"How long have you know this . . . Adele . . . did you say?"

"Two years."

There was a silence. Jan felt, almost tangibly, that Nanny was on the side of Lorely and the past. It was natural, he realised, since Nanny herself had shared Jan and Lorely's past. She knew nothing of Adele. "Must it come out in the papers?" she asked vainly. "Isn't there anything?"

"Would you have me stay away from Adele when she's in this trouble? Whatever she did, whether she killed her husband or not, by design or by accident, I'm sure it was because of me. She wouldn't be where she is now if it weren't for me. I can't let her down."

"She's not your wife."

"She loves me."

"Yes, you've two people to think of."

"Three."

"Your baby." In spite of everything, Nanny's interest grew warm. "What's he like? He must be a fine boy, your son. Who does he take after? You?"

"I can't see it. I think he's like father—he's got the Hegen dark eyes. He's a philosophical fellow, doesn't scream for what he can't have, not for long. He's healthy, too, a good strong back. We named him after me." Then Jan saw that Nanny's eyes, though dry, were tragic. "I thought I could assure his future," he pleaded, "I was going to give him everything."

"I know." Nanny nodded sadly. "I've heard people decide to have babies as they would furniture, or new clothes. They think they can plan, but babies have plans of their own. From the very first day. What parents want for a baby and what baby wants for himself, won't be the same. Your son may want his father."

"I want my son."

"You should have thought of that." It was the first word of criticism that Nanny had allowed herself, and Jan saw that it was just. Nanny was not judging him, he knew. She was trying to help him and, to do so, she had to see things clearly. "You can't keep your son and protect your wife, both," she pointed out, "and look after the other woman. That's what you're trying to do, isn't it?"

"I might have done it, if this hadn't happened."

"It has happened. Your wife, you say, doesn't know. Your child—well, if a baby's with its mother, it's world's secure. I'm more sorry for that child's mother. And for you, Jan. My poor Jan."

"I deserved it," Jan accused himself. "I should have been wiser. How, I don't know. But I think I tried to divide my loyalty. You can't do it. You can't be true to more than one person or principle. I couldn't be true to both Adele and Lorely. I tried to be. They both loved me, both needed me. And I've failed them both. I wanted you to know the story, Nanny, so that if anything happened to me, someone could tell my boy about his father."

"He'll have his mother?"

"Will he? How do we know? Suppose she's found guilty?" The thought was intolerable. Jan could no longer sit quietly. He got up and took a turn about the confined little room. "Nanny—I love her! She was alone. When I found her she had nothing, where I had everything. She'd suffered—the Germans tortured her—she'd been in that evil place. She'd lost her father and mother. She would have died if I hadn't come. I only wanted to see her get well, grow young again, believe in someone. I never thought of loving her, or of her loving me. But it was me she believed in! For me, that she grew young and lovely, full of life and joy. I made her! I love her! It'll kill me, if anything happens to her!"

"Jan, dear, come and sit down." Nanny got up and went to Jan and took his arm. "Please come and sit down. Nothing will happen to her. Sit down and tell me again what happened?"

Nanny persuaded Jan to go back to his chair, settling him into it with small soothing pats and gestures. Some of the bright colour had gone from her cheeks. A few wisps of straight grey hair escaping from her severe hair-line robbed her of her customary air of composure and good cheer. She looked old, dumpy and distressed and, for a moment, at a loss as she unstoppered the brandy bottle and poured out a generous measure. "Drink this, dear," she gave it to Jan, "didn't you say you wanted to see her and couldn't? Perhaps I could go and see her? I could take her a message? Nobody knows me."

Jan drained the brandy. "You could go and see her . . ." he realised. The sudden prospect, although it solved nothing, put new life into him. It was the nearest thing to seeing Adele himself. All the things that he wanted to explain to her, rushed at once into his mind. He took hold of Nanny's arm and clung to it. "Would you go and see her?" he begged. "Truly? Tell her why I can't come! Explain to her, that it's for her sake! If she'd told me—but she didn't. When I know her defence, I'll be able to go then. Tell her that! Tell her about the liftman. Put it so that she'll understand!"

Nanny covered the frantic clinging hand. "I can't tell her till I understand myself, dear. Have some more brandy, and tell me again, what I'm to say."

The sun was setting as Jan left Nanny's villa to drive back to town. Throughout the warm and windy day the clouds had been massing and piling and now they had taken fire, they were falling to earth in flaring trails, and the havoc was spreading. It was as though the whole sky were burning redly into ruin. Against it, each hedge and tree and rooftop stood forth like a blackened shell. Jan thought that the scene held a beauty that was cruel in its totality, a devastation in which the day's more tender elements must perish. He thought, as he drove steadily homewards, that there were reckonings in experience as well as in nature, that were inescapable. His talk with Nanny, in addition to the human comfort it had brought him, had caused him to see his life in clearer perspective, only someone who knew you

always had this power to link up the years, so that you saw them in their entirety.

He had tried to do right but he had brought to confusion and certain unhappiness four people's lives, Lorely's, Adele's, his son's, and his own. Whatever he did, whatever transpired, he could not be true to everybody. He had not been true to himself.

Lorely, his past was hers. Quiet, unadventurous, often difficult, the past remained, the stranding of a multitude of shared experiences; small things, but they formed a chain that was long and strong and had no breaks. It had been painfully forged, that chain. Even now, Jan did not wish to see it broken: the years, with their hard-won experience, cast away, and lost. The chain of marriage was made to endure and to be added to, until it could not fail. What a mighty thing was loyalty, protective, as well as protecting.

Jan had no right to Adele's love. He had not been free to love her. But he had made her his, taken her love, and her trust: formed a new, though shorter, chain. He deserved no one's loyalty, neither Adele's nor Lorely's. He deserved no protection. And he had none.

There was no way out. Death was the least way, and the least likely. He would live. To what future? He was the enemy of those whom he loved. He was his own enemy.

It seemed that there was no more in his life than would be left of these flaming heavens, this conflagration, this heartless bonfire in the skies.

By the time Jan reached the heart of London darkness was falling. He parked the car in one of the narrow secretive streets of Soho and got out and walked towards Piccadilly. He dreaded to go home.

The evening was immeasurably beautiful, warm and tranquil, the stilled sky a luminous sapphire above the aura of the city's lights.

Jan was hot, and he was so tired that his body moved automatically as though driven by some will of its own. Like this, he could walk all night. He knew that he was very hungry. He

walked on. Needing food, needing rest, he was being driven out of himself. He could not stop.

Jan was not looking for a church. But the soft dark arch drew him unexpectedly. He possessed no orthodox faith. Catholic or Anglican, churches were to him places of meditation and rest for the spirit; where a man could pray, or give thanks, or weep, and none would observe him. A church was a sanctuary of sorrows.

In the cool dry shadows a few figures were kneeling. Above the dim hanging circlets of the lanterns the vaulting of the ancient roof met like the apex of hands at prayer. Beyond lay the gentle radiance and benison of the altar.

Jan could not pray. Alone and awful, wrapped as it were in winding-sheets of pain and grief, he remained at the back of the church.

Near him, upon their own humble altar, burned the candles of those who had prayed here and departed. These candles were their prayers.

Jan went to the rack and selected a long thick candle. He pushed a pound-note into the offertory box and lighted the candle and raised it among the others.

A prayer for Adele.

Because it was long and thick, the candle burned for many hours. In time, however, it failed; and there burned in its stead the prayer of a stranger.

. Chapter Twenty-Five

"YOU'VE TAKEN MY PERFUME!"

Adele rounded on the girl sitting on the next bed to hers in the hospital ward of Holloway prison. Adele's suitcase lay open on the small chair beside her bed. She had turned away from it for a few seconds to re-fold a skirt on her bed. Now, the flask of essence was missing.

The accused, a sullen girl named Jean, sat on her bed with her

thick legs widely planted and her head hanging down, combing her hair downwards in a long screen over her face. She did not reply. Adele went close to her. "You! Where's my perfume?" It seemed incredible to Adele that the short heavy body could have moved so swiftly and silently as to have appropriated the flask and returned to its present situation unobserved. But none of the other six of the ward's inmates was near enough. And the perfume had been there a moment before.

"Answer me!"

"I never seen your niff." It was almost a growl from behind the oily screen of hair. The dirty wide-toothed comb continued its downward movements.

A sharp rage swept Adele. She seized the greasy bleached tresses, close to the scalp, and held on. The girl's head twisted. Her black eyes slewed sideways and upwards.

"Leggo."

"Give it to me." Adele's grip tightened.

"Thought you was a lady."

"I may be a lady. But I'll have my perfume."

"I never seen it,"

"I'll scalp you! Where is it?"

"Give it her, Jean," advised a plump prostitute, Marie, a few beds away. "She'll have your hair off."

Jean, her head immovably held, screamed suddenly, "She can f—ing well find it!"

Marie shrugged. "It's your hair."

But Adele was satisfied with the admission. She released her victim. "That's all I wanted to know. Next time—but there won't be a next time. . . ." She turned back to the case, locked her make-up box and locked the case, and slipped the keys into her pocket.

"'Ere," said the coarse voice. Jean was holding out the missing flask. "I don't want your bloody niff. There's nothing to it."

"Keep it." Now that she had won, Adele felt a warming exaltation, and a lofty pity for this girl who had to steal the luxuries that, to Adele, were given. "It's faint in the bottle," she

explained, "but it comes out in the wearing. You can have it. I can get some more."

"From 'im?" The girl jerked her head towards the flowers that had come for Adele that morning, the great sheaf of gladioli that rayed out like swords of flame and gold and ivory from the stubby pot on the bleak deal table.

Adele sat down upon her bed. "Yes," she claimed proudly. "He'll give me anything." The others were round her now. They had crept up stealthily, attracted by the hope of a fight, of any unleashing of the bottled passions that were turning them bad. Outside, it was a summer morning. They could feel it, although the big high windows, eight of them round the ward, were shut; and the sunlight had bars.

Adele already knew something of the history of each of these women. Marie, the prostitute, who had appropriated a client's wallet without payment of body or kind, had primed Adele of a lot of things during morning exercise on this, Adele's first day on remand. But if Marie hoped thus to get Adele's story, Adele thought, she was going to be disappointed. The papers had said little so far; and Adele was not adding to their account for the benefit of Marie.

Adele glanced round the silent group of women, relating her impressions to what she had already heard about them. With one exception, they were a patchy crowd. There were a shop-lifter: a middle-aged suburban woman who had carried a too-large bag once too often round the C. & A. Stores. A youngish pregnant girl, silent, slatternly, but of a considerable beauty. Marie had got no change out of her, either. There was a woman of about sixty, who had forged a signature to someone else's post office savings account; tall and slim, she had an air of faded authority; she was not gentry; but might have been the servant of gentry. In Marie's opinion, she gave herself airs considering that, like the rest of them, she'd tried to get something for nothing and failed. Then there were Jean and Marie, the prostitutes who had added receiving and thieving to their trade. None of these would have attracted attention in a shopping queue.

The exception was an abortionist, a gaunt bleached woman,

who would have stood apart from any crowd. In Adele's eyes she resembled a discarded bone, sallow, dried, grained with ill-usage and yet without feeling. Adele had taken one look at her yellowed hands, her grimed nails, and had thought of dirty beds, soiled towels, of the unsterilised instruments of an ignorant and avaricious surgery. No wonder someone had died.

On a bed at the end of the ward, lay another woman. Except when aroused for food and exercise, she lay there all the time, motionlessly, with her eyes closed. Marie said she was in for peddling drugs; but thought that the woman herself was an addict. Before long, Marie prophesied, she would start to scream and weep and they would take her away.

Because Adele had seen women like these, and worse, in the camp; and knew to what levels of crime and degradation the most unsuspecting nature could be driven; she felt no recoil from the women here. Adele had been driven lower than any of these. She had known the best and the worst of this world. And the best, dredged from the mud of her suffering, was the protecting gold of Jan's love. None of these women was loved as she, Adele, was loved. With all that had happened, Jan's love was still Adele's talisman; and while she had it, nothing here could touch her.

"Give you anything, will 'e?" Jean sneered at Adele. "What man *gives* anything?"

"Mine gives me everything." Adele thought of Jan's letter that had come this morning. He loved her, was thinking of her, would come as soon as he could. Soon! . . . how soon? It was like a bright armour between herself and these women, the thought of seeing Jan.

"Got you in here, too, didn't he?" Marie was still sore about Adele's reticence.

"He did not!" Adele defended Jan sharply. But the suggestion disturbed her. Somewhere, there was truth in it.

"All right," Marie shrugged. "You'd be here the same as if you'd never laid eyes on him. Your boy friend's nothing to do with your husband being dead. Oh, nothing!"

Adele was silent.

"Eh? Where does he come in?"

They were all waiting for Adele's reply. She wasn't charged with murder for nothing, they were sure. They wanted details. They'd get them in time. But not from Adele.

"He loves me," Adele's head lifted. "He'll stick to me."

"You wait and see," suggested Jean with heavy spite.

"Where's your baby?" asked the pregnant girl.

"He's with friends." Adele had been glad to hand the baby over to Mrs. Humphries after she was arrested. He would have to be weaned: and Adele herself was now suffering discomfort. But she wouldn't have Jan's son in prison.

"What happened?" wheedled Marie, "tell us, dear. There's no bloody judges here."

"You can read it in the papers."

"We have. But not your side. They haven't put in your boy friend."

"They don't know who he is," Adele replied unguardedly.

"Oh, keeping out, is he?"

"Nothing like that! He lives for me, you'll see, I've had a letter, and the flowers, and he's coming."

"When?"

"I don't know, when do you have visitors?"

"You can have 'em every day, 's far as I know. I been in two weeks, and no one's come near me. . . ."

"Every day!" Adele glowed.

"This is a prison, not a love nest," Marie reminded her. "There's no beds for visitors."

"And no standing up the wall, neither," added Jean. "They watch you, same as you was in fer life. . . ."

"Men don't hang around prisons," said the pregnant girl. "You've a hope."

"Mine will come."

"Think a lot of him, don't you?" Marie's tone was not inimical.

"Everything."

"The bleeding lot of them're all the same. They keep out where there's trouble. No man's different. What makes you think yours is?"

"He is different. He never forgets me, every hour of the day." Adele fought passionately for Jan's name. "He's a good man."

"Hear that?" Marie looked across at Jean. "Think you've gone deaf, or something? A good man!" She turned again to Adele. "Dear—there isn't one."

There was an abrupt silence as the door opened and a wardress came in. "Forrest," she commanded, "you've a visitor."

Hope blazed in Adele. She'd show these women! Who else could her visitor be but Jan?

As soon as Adele saw Nanny, she knew that Nanny did not, and was unlikely ever to like her. Adele saw herself as she must appear in Nanny's eyes, how small, and young—and even unreliable—she must appear as a consort for Jan, and the mother of his child. The sharp eyes in the rosy face, though they wished Adele well, seemed to go right through her. They knew that Adele would stick at nothing where her life or her love were threatened. They knew that Adele had never told Jan that she had a husband; and they wondered why. They knew that, somehow, Adele had taken Jan's heart and hurt it. But they knew also that Jan loved Adele. It was their charge to protect Jan's love.

Adele sat down on the small straight chair and clasped her thin fingers upon the edge of the scarred wooden table. The shock of not finding Jan here had been like a door closing in her face. It seemed to her that Jan, by sending Nanny, had closed that door. Why had he not come? She was afraid to know.

Nanny regarded the tight expression of the round face that should be soft and mobile. The pale curls appeared deceptive, like those of a cosseted child. She was not encouraged. The face and nature of this woman, she saw, were not compatible; even as the small beguiling children had often proved the most difficult of her charges. Moreover, there was a wardress listening and watching in the background. She, not Nanny, was in authority. Nanny had not been prepared to guard her words in the presence of the law. She became uncertain of what she was to say.

Adele's fingers tightened. "When is Jan coming?" she asked.

"He's in a sad difficulty," Nanny answered as quietly as she could and surreptitiously turned up her hearing aid. "That's why I've come—I'm to tell you from him."

"Won't he tell me?" Adele interrupted. "Why's that?"

Nanny glanced at the wardress. "It's the evidence," she whispered, "at the place where you last met." She dared not mention it by name.

"They'll know where that was," Adele explained. "I wanted to tell Jan, I kept a diary, just dates and places, I didn't write in it every day. I must have missed it when . . . when I . . ." she faltered. "I never noticed till last night it wasn't in my bag. It may have dropped down by the bed. If the police find it, it's got the restaurant written down. It was a new one, we hadn't been to."

"And his name?"

"Just the address, and the time."

"I'll tell him. But it's his name he's worrying over, not the restaurant. Because of the evidence." Nanny was put off by the wardress. She wanted to speak out boldly, but she was sure the wardress was listening although she did not appear to be even looking at them. Nanny was afraid of doing the opposite to what Jan had intended; and giving away his secret to the police. She did not know that nothing that she said here could go any further. "He can't give evidence," she conveyed it in a distressed whisper, "he says, it's for your sake."

"Why for my sake?"

"If he gives his name, they'll ask him questions. About the restaurant. About the time you got there. He says, they'll want to know if you were late."

"Jan doesn't know if I was late," Adele remembered, Jan had arrived after she did. "I was there first. What does he mean?" Fear was approaching her. Was Jan making excuses, not to come and see her?

"Mr. Jan told me to tell you he's afraid they'll ask him questions about the time you got there."

"Why is he afraid?"

"I think it's because he doesn't know."

"I can tell you," Adele said, more confidently. They leaned together conspiratorially across the table, "I was there at half-past eight as we said."

"Mr. Jan can't say that."

"But, I'm saying, it *was* the time! Tell him, please!"

"Mr. Jan says he can't say for certain the time you were there. Because he was recognised. By the liftman." Wardress or no wardress, Nanny had said what Jan told her to say. Jan had convinced her that if Adele knew about the liftman, she would understand everything. Nanny sat back and her chair-leg tapped the bare floor. Multiplied a hundredfold by the hidden microphone, the sound was like a chopper meeting the block. Tiny wires conveyed to her ear even the movements of her own clothes so that they sounded like the shingle-drag of some thunderous surf. Yet if she turned down the volume, she might not catch Adele's answers.

"But if he was recognised," Adele worked it out slowly, "he can still say he didn't know if I was late?"

For an instant, Nanny forgot the wardress. The situation was on her nerves, and she spoke her mind. "Why should Mr. Jan say you weren't late, if you were?"

Adele read the accusation in Nanny's expression. Because what she replied might be carried back to Jan, she fought it. But she knew she had hesitated a second too long. "I wasn't late," she denied. "Jan didn't know. He could say that."

"Not if he was recognised," Nanny clung stubbornly to Jan's instructions. "The liftman knew him. He was liftman at Mr. Jan's old club."

"But if someone knew Jan was late, it doesn't make any difference," Adele thought, it need not stop Jan from coming to see her. He could say that he didn't know what time she got to the restaurant. It couldn't be the only reason why he hadn't come. Her fear came closer and she rushed to meet it, to grapple with it before it was finally upon her.

"He doesn't want his name to come out, does he? Because of the publicity—his wife?"

"It's the evidence, he says," Nanny insisted stealthily, "he

can't give evidence for you. He daren't. Because of the liftman."

Adele brought down her clenched hands upon the table with a small thud. "There's another reason!"

"If there is, I don't know it," Nanny answered doughtily. "Mr. Jan told me I was to say he loves you. No matter what happened, he says. He loves you. He'll wait for you."

"Wait for me!" Adele cried bitterly. "Is he going to wait till I come out? If I come out?"

"He's got to." Nanny could feel it now, the weary drag of their waiting. "What else is there?"

"Doesn't he want to see me?" Tears slipped from Adele's eyes. She did not know that she was crying.

"As much as you want to see him." Nanny wept, also. She was caught between the bitterness of them both. "But he says you must wait. It mayn't be for long."

"He's afraid, isn't he?"

"For you."

"For her? For his wife?"

"Poor Mr. Jan . . . he's afraid now, for you all."

Fear had entered Adele. She was cold all through. Jan had failed her. He had chosen to stay silent . . . had chosen his wife. Only Jan himself could help her now, could reassure her that she'd been mistaken, that he was not deserting her, leaving her in this stone place, to die without him. The small bare room became frightening; it was worse than if it were empty, because it contained these strangers, these enemies, who were not Jan.

Adele stood up. "I want Jan," she said childishly.

Nanny rose and would have put out her hand to Adele, but she was aware of a sharp movement of the wardress's head. Her words sought to comfort. "He'll write to you, he'll send you everything that's allowed."

"I want to see him," Adele repeated. Her tears had ceased. Her heart seemed to be drying as though, from that stricken source, the last drops had welled and fallen. "I don't want what he sends, only to see him."

"You will, dear. Be patient, you will. One thing he asked me, where's your son, dear?"

Adele answered tonelessly, "He's with Mrs. Humphries. He's better with her. I wouldn't have my baby in prison."

"It's not prison to him. You're his mother. His home."

"I don't want him! I only want Jan."

Nanny was shocked. But because she thought that, perhaps, Adele did not know what she was saying, she kept the reproach from her voice. "Maybe you'll change your mind. They'll let you have him. They won't keep him away. When would you like me to come again? Perhaps you'll have him then, and I could see him?"

"Nol" Adele turned sharply to Nanny. "Please don't come again."

"But, dear, I can tell you how Mr. Jan is, tell him how you are. He'll want to know."

"He can't have both of us!"

The envenomed reply, uncoiled from the springs of Adele's jealousy, failed to pierce Nanny's understanding. Nanny knew nothing of hatred and jealousy. She knew only the small fierce passions of children, and their underlying helplessness. Adults, like children, needed love when they were angry. Nanny eased the hard hat above her warm forehead, and tried again. "I'll come as often as you'd like me to? Every day?"

Adele shook her head. "Please don't come again. Thank you for coming today. But there's no one I want to see now." Adele looked at the wardress. "I'd like to go back to the ward."

As Adele returned with the wardress through the stone channels of the prison, it seemed to her that she was journeying backwards in time.

Jan had not come, he had thought of his wife and had drawn back, away from Adele, who had loved and given birth and taken life for love of him. He had been afraid; he had not come.

All the hours that she had spent, they had not counted against Jan's wife. His hands, taking the child from hers on the day they brought him home. '*Our baby*,' he had said. His expression, turning to hers, during the tender months of waiting, he, too, had seemed to be expanding. '*You're expecting*,' she had teased him, '*you're pregnant*.'

The lake, the silent hours, the passionate hours, hands and voice, the weight, the need of him.

All gone. *'You are never alone while I think of you.'* He had written that, when she was sick and ugly and alone. But it wasn't true. He thought of her, oh, yes, he thought of her! But she was alone, all the same. He hadn't come. It was Jan's wife who was not alone, not Adele.

Hurrying down the echoing corridor, Adele fled the following winds of her thoughts. But they overtook her, the black bats of her fears beat about her. There had been other hours like this in her life, when it had seemed that she was thus being driven forwards, urged out of darkness, into darkness. With Jan, for a time, Adele had carried a lamp. Now she was lost again.

As the wardress opened the door of the ward, Adele saw that there was another wardress standing a few yards within the ward. She was holding a wicker hamper, and the women were crowding about her. "For you, Forrest," the wardress said, and set the hamper down on the deal table, under Jan's flowers.

Adele looked at the hamper. It might have been the first hamper that Jan had brought her, so similar was it; though across this hamper, like straps, lay the shadows of the bars.

"Open it, then!" prompted Marie, as Adele stood still and looked at the hamper. "See what he's sent you! We're not interested."

"I don't want it." As from far off, two years' away, Adele heard the weakness of her own voice. "You can have it. . . ."

They saw that she meant it. Jean reached the hamper first. Adele heard their voices, swooping round it.

"Grub!"

"A bird!"

"'Ere, mind who you're shoving!"

"A hundred fags! Hands off. I found 'em!"

Adele left them to it. She went over to her bed and climbed on to it. Slowly she drew up her knees upwards towards her chin. Her arms closed round them.

Thus curved, in antenatal discomfort, she withdrew from a world that had failed her.

Chapter Twenty-Six

JAN ARRIVED AT THE OLD BAILEY half an hour before the court was due to sit for the trial of Adele for the murder of her husband. He chose a seat in the centre of the tier behind the glass-screened dock, where Adele would not see him unless she turned round and searched the gallery, and where he thought it improbable that she would be able to see him from the distance of the witness-box at the side of the judge's dais. There were limits to their endurance and restraint; and to come face to face publicly amid this cold officialdom, Jan thought, might overthrow all that they had already suffered to keep their history a secret.

The four weeks that they had been separated had left Jan weak with spent emotion, and worn with hours of complex thought and the consideration of problems to which there could be no solution until this trial was over and the verdict known. When that verdict came, one phase of the agony would end. A new phase would begin. Everything that had been Jan's life until this hour, was in the melting-pot. So he took his seat quietly and wished that, for a moment, he could kneel and pray.

While he waited, Jan considered Adele's case. He knew now that her defence rested mainly upon the mystery of her movements during the twenty minutes after she said she had left Justin, and the hour of eight-thirty, when Justin died. Adele had stated that she was on her way to an appointment at eight-thirty. Enquiries at the restaurant had produced no one who remembered seeing Adele arrive there at eight-thirty, or any other hour. Only Jan could state that she had not arrived by eight-thirty, or, presumably, by ten to nine when he spoke to the liftman. Jan himself was the missing witness for the Crown. Or so he believed.

Was Adele with her husband when he died? Did she push him through the broken banisters? From the story, as he knew it so far, Jan could not decide. But the jury must decide without his evidence. Guilty or innocent, Jan was standing by Adele.

A knock came upon an outer door. Jan rose with the assembly. Now there was colour in the court, the judicial scarlet. There was a bowing and a settling. And Adele was coming up the steps into the dock.

The brief years fled from Jan and he saw again, not the warm and alive Adele of their love; but the girl whom he had found on the divan, the lost creature who had locked her heart against love and hope and comfort in the days when Jan first knew her. Ascending the stairs, she was passing Jan in profile. She was as pale as she had ever been, and she was wearing a soft-looking black suit with a white blouse and a small black hat. Because she had grown so thin, it seemed that the suit hung upon her as loosely as her earlier clothes had done. A month in prison might have taken Adele's weight and colour; but prison alone would not have robbed Adele of her faith. This was not the girl who had believed in, and worshipped Jan. This was a hardened bitter woman, who believed in nothing. It was the Adele of the camp.

For an instant, Jan shut his eyes; and felt his tears grow cold behind the closed lids. It had not been his imagination then, that something had severed the sympathetic bond between himself and Adele during the past weeks. Loving her, longing for her, aching for the sight of his son, Jan had known: Adele was beyond reach of his longing or his love. If Jan were to stand up now and go to her, it would be of no avail. Jan opened his eyes. Mr. Carlton Wilby was opening the case for the Crown.

Carlton Wilby was an advocate whose chief weapon, other than an icy clarity of mind, was a disarming mildness of manner. Where other advocates drove into the cross-examination of their witnesses with their legal decks stripped visibly for battle, Carlton Wilby, true to Old Bailey tradition, addressed his victims with cool simplicity, his limpid eyes fastened upon some object in the court rather as though he were thinking about something else. It was a strategy that had caught many a witness off his guard. In appearance he was a short ovoid man with small feet and tiny dimpled hands. His silvery voice with its far-away note was audible in the remotest corners of the court.

The history of Adele emerged musically into the silence. It opened with the introductory bars that were Adele's particulars, her history since the outbreak of war, her marriage, experiences in German hands, parents' death, and her return to England. At this point, counsel paused. His composition was broadening into the first of its three movements: that would become a consideration of the conditions, passions, and actions that had brought Adele into this court. Carlton Wilby's speech, in effect, was a symphony, orchestrated by the complex instruments of a woman's life.

Adele held her hands together in her lap, and listened closely. This was the voice of the man who had come here to expose her, if he could, to break her story. Adele did not mean to be broken. She had given her account of what had happened, so often, that she herself half-believed it to be true. And if it were not true, she still intended that it should be believed. Her story, her love and her hatred, were hers alone. Rather than that anyone in this court should learn them, she would die. And if she died, she would take them with her to the grave.

Somewhere, locked away, was a memory that had been a fire and a radiance within her. Now it was cold. Adele would not stir it to see what life remained there. She would not think of Jan. She had come here to take part in this, her final struggle against authority. She meant to win. That was why, bowing her head to her clasped hands, she listened.

"Shortly after the defendant came out of hospital," Carlton Wilby was saying, "she met a man, whom she prefers not to name, who befriended her, and whose mistress she became. This man believed the defendant to be a widow. She continued to reside at 3, Tracey Mews. By this man, on the twelfth of February, this year, she had a son. This child was registered as the son of the defendant's husband, Justin Forrest, who at that date was living, and had lived for eight years in Ceylon. On the sixteenth of May, this year, Mr. Forrest was found dead in the well of the block of flats where he was then living, that is, at 19, Notley Chambers, Chelsea. He had fallen, or been pushed through a gap in the banisters that railed off the third floor

landing on which his flat was situated. A doctor will tell you that he died when he fell, at approximately eight-thirty.

"According to the defendant's statement which will be read, the deceased visited her at Tracey Mews on the second of May this year. She had not then seen him for eight years. He asked her to return to him, which she refused to do. Letters were then received by the defendant from her husband, pressing his plea. The defendant destroyed these letters and did not reply to them. On the sixteenth of May, at seven-thirty, the defendant called on her husband at his flat. She says that the reason for her visit was that he was pestering her. An argument took place and the defendant says that she refused finally to return to her husband. She left him at ten minutes past eight, in order to keep an appointment at eight-thirty at a restaurant which she declines to name, with her lover, whose name she continues to refuse to disclose. She did not stay to have dinner with him because she was not feeling well. She arrived at Tracey Mews in a taxi at twenty minutes past nine. That is her story."

Carlton Wilby picked up a fresh sheaf of notes. A deeper note seemed to enter his discourse, although his voice continued its dulcet delivery.

"Next door to the deceased," he continued, "lives a lady, Mrs. Joan Harris. Mrs. Harris will tell you that, shortly before eight o'clock, she heard raised voices through the thin wall separating her room from that of Justin Forrest. She heard a woman's voice, and the words, 'I'm saying what's true. I'll ask him tonight.' Mrs. Harris then switched on her radio. At eight-thirty, she switched off her radio. She then heard a woman's voice on the landing outside, saying, 'I'll kill you!' She will tell you that she recognised the voice to be that of the woman she had heard with Justin Forrest, just over half an hour previously.

"Almost at once, Mrs. Harris heard a crash and the impact of Mr. Forrest's body as he fell into the well of the block, three storeys below. Mrs. Harris at once went on to the landing, and will tell you that there was no sign of the lady whose voice she had heard. There are a seventy-eight stairs from the third-floor landing to the hall, and Mrs. Harris will say that, although

she is an active woman, she could not have descended those stairs and made her exit from the building in the few seconds that elapsed before she emerged on to the landing. Detective-Inspector Cook will tell you that from the window of Mr. Forrest's living-room there is a fire-escape, and that the window on to this was found open when the room was examined shortly afterwards. From this evidence, you may conclude that whoever was with Mr. Forrest when he fell, disappeared so quickly as to suggest that she did not wish to be associated with the events immediately preceding his death; and that she therefore made her escape from the building by the fire-escape.

"It is for you, members of the jury, to decide from the evidence whether Mrs. Forrest is speaking the truth when she says that she left her husband at eight-ten, and not at eight-thirty; that is, before and not after he died; or whether there was any other woman who might have visited Mr. Forrest, between eight-ten and eight-thirty whose voice—if Mrs. Harris's testimony is disputed—was the voice Mrs. Harris heard saying 'I'll kill you!' . . . Mr. John Forrest, the father of the deceased, will tell you that he saw his son three weeks before his death, when he gathered that the deceased did not wish to marry again and that he had taken a general dislike to women."

Adele thought, 'Someone heard me . . . but it's my word against hers . . . why should they believe her, and not me?' She was more concerned about Justin's letter to her, that Carlton Wilby was now about to read: Justin's unposted letter, that she had not known existed when she inferred that Justin still loved her, and wanted her to go back to him.

'DEAR ADELE,' Justin had written, 'This will be my last letter to you. Since you do not answer my letters, it is clear to me now that you intend to treat me with the contempt you have always done in the past.

'When I came to see you, two weeks ago, I admit it was to ask if you would lend me something to get started again, after my misadventures at Chilawatte. I did not wish or expect you to have any further interest in me, but I felt you owed me something

for the way you had treated me in the past. If you had shown me the slightest consideration, I would have been prepared to deal sympathetically with your infidelity, and the child you have unlawfully registered as my son.

'I could claim this child, you know. But I do not want your child by another man. I want nothing more to do with you, nor to meet you again. The course of the law is open to me—to cite your lover in my divorce case. This man has stolen your affections and robbed me of any hope of the reconciliation I might have desired. I think that the law will award me damages on this score.

'You seem concerned to keep this man's name a secret. No doubt you have your reasons. But I have not been idle. Within a few hours, possibly, I expect to be in possession of his name. . . .

'It is no use treating me as though I do not exist. I do exist. I have my feelings, and my rights. These have never interested you in the past. To discover an interest in me now, will be futile.

'JUSTIN.'

"From this letter," continued Carlton Wilby's untroubled tones, "you may conclude that Mrs. Forrest was not speaking the truth when she stated that her husband wished her to return to him. You may ask yourselves what, in fact, was the burden of their argument on the night her husband met his death. Mr. Forrest was threatening to expose this unnamed lover. Mrs. Forrest was, and still is, determined to conceal his identity."

Adele listened, as Carlton Wilby described how her flat had been found after she left it . . . only the broken pieces of the bust had given her away, she'd not had time to hide those. A spark of triumph flared, as Adele heard that they had never discovered Jan's name: but the spark died, what was the good of it all, since Jan had failed her? He would see her hang, rather than face the scandal and give the evidence which must surely save her: that she was with him at the Alexandra at eight-thirty. Jan himself was late, she might have been waiting any time for all he knew. No, his story about the liftman could not be true, he

had sent Nanny because he did not love her enough to come himself. Adele's triumph was ashes.

Carlton Wilby had returned to the subject of Adele's alibi. Adele, he submitted, had said that at eight-thirty—the hour at which her husband died—she was at a restaurant whose particulars she withheld. From a diary found in the flat by the police, it had been established that she had this appointment at eight-thirty and that the restaurant was the Alexandra in Panton Street. Enquiries had been made, and Adele had not been noticed there at any hour on the evening in question. This information was not submitted as evidence that she was not there. The significant fact was that Adele had suppressed the name of the restaurant, as she had suppressed the name of her lover.

Carlton Wilby brought into play a solo string. "I will pass no comment," he said thinly, "on the character of the man whose mistress this woman is and whose son she has borne, in that he does not come forward to support her at this time, or to confirm her alibi, if it be true. That she has a lover, in the face of the evidence, there can be no denying. He may be present in this court. But whether she was with him at eight-thirty"—Carlton Wilby's theme was strengthening—"is a matter that she herself is prepared to leave in doubt, rather than name publicly the man whom she states could support her alibi and clear her in this court. I suggest that, in the light of these facts, it becomes clear that Mrs. Forrest's frame of mind on this issue was such that she was prepared to destroy her husband rather than allow him to name the defendant's lover in the divorce courts.

"You may suppose that the prisoner has not named her lover because she did not keep her appointment at the Alexandra; or because, if she did keep it, she arrived there much later than she has stated. You may then ask yourselves whether, if she was late, and her lover knew it, she would not still have called upon him to support her alibi and save her in this court. The evidence makes clear that for some reason or other, at no time in the events leading up to the death of her husband, was Mrs. Forrest prepared to disclose her lover's identity.

"According to her own testimony, the defendant was with her husband only a short time before he died. They were having an argument. And he was threatening her with the exposure of a secret which means more to the defendant than her life."

Carlton Wilby was bringing his full orchestra into play. Jan kept his eyes on Adele's slender back, as his thoughts moved with Carlton Wilby's argument, his reiteration of the evidence of Mrs. Harris, the fact of the shattered balustrade, that Justin himself could not have failed to have been aware of, and to have avoided if he were able.

"The deceased was a large man," Carlton Wilby proceeded, "and Mrs. Forrest was a frail woman. But a push can cause a person who is off his guard to lose his balance; and, if he slipped, there was nothing to break Justin Forrest's fall to the stone floor thirty feet below. Members of the jury, every malicious killing is murder. It is for you to decide, from the evidence, whether it was the defendant who was on the landing with her husband at eight-thirty; and whether, if she was there, she pushed him through the gap in the balustrade, and that she thereby intended his death. If you are satisfied of these facts it will be my duty to ask you, after hearing the evidence, to find Mrs. Forrest guilty of murder."

There was the case for the crown. Adele had lied concerning her movements on the night of Justin's death, and her relations with Justin. She was with Justin when he died; and she had good reasons for desiring his death. The prosecution would now call its witnesses to that effect.

Jan felt an extraordinary detachment: as though his memory, with its load of love and sadness, were divorced from his consciousness as he sat here with all his faculties blended for the examination of the evidence against Adele. Outside the court, he knew that the usual febrile crowd would be collecting; drawn by morbid and irresistible curiosity to stare, if it could, at the principals of a drama of sex and murder. The newspapers had made great play upon the missing witness—"Mr. X", as he was styled. It had been variously mooted, in places high and low, that 'Mr. X' was an archbishop; that he was royalty; or black.

Here in this court, harboured unknowingly by the packed spectators, 'Mr. X' sat quietly. There was no fever here. The legal temperature was normal, or slightly below. It cooled the minds of all who were present. Even Jan's mind.

Detective-Inspector Cook was testifying as to his finding of the plaster cast of Jan's head. The shattered unrecognisable fragments were being handled by the jury, by the judge, were being replaced in a brown-paper parcel. They were no longer particular to Jan and Adele. They were legal history with a label attached, exhibit number two. Exhibit number one had been Justin's unposted letter.

Having called a number of lesser witnesses, Carlton Wilby then examined his principal witness, Mrs. Harris. Whereupon Sir Thomas Portland, Q.C., counsel for the defence, rose to cross-examine her.

Sir Thomas was a man of different calibre altogether from Carlton Wilby. Where Carlton Wilby was *pianissimo*, Sir Thomas was *forte*. He was a large man, of leonine aspect and considerable good looks. If Sir Thomas could snatch a beautiful woman from the gallows, it would give him more than mere legal satisfaction. Or even a woman who was not beautiful.

Mrs. Harris was of the type often, and with accuracy, described as a 'good sort'. Tall, with a well-rouged bony face and dyed black hair, she wore a bright green rep coat over a green and white summer frock, and white cotton gloves. She was not dismayed by the proceedings. She had helped Carlton Wilby and she was perfectly willing to help Sir Thomas.

"Mrs. Harris——" Sir Thomas demanded, in a voice that made war on the silence, "when you heard sounds of an argument next door to you on the night in question, you say you switched on 'Family Favourites?' "

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Harris, "I never listen to rows. . . ."

"Are you absolutely certain that the programme you switched on was 'Family Favourites?' "

"Oh, yes, sir. I always listen to 'Family Favourites' at eight o'clock on Wednesday."

"The sixteenth of May was a Thursday."

"Oh," said Mrs. Harris, at a loss. "Well, it sounded like 'Family Favourites' to me. That's what I thought it was."

"From this *Radio Times* in my hand, I observe that there was a programme of 'Family Favourites' at eight o'clock on the Light Programme on Wednesday the fifteenth of May. On the sixteenth of May at eight o'clock, there was a Talk on the Home programme. The Light Programme was 'Hamley's Choice'."

Mrs. Harris took the *Radio Times* from the usher and inspected it. It was passed to the jury, and to the judge. Everyone saw that the programme Mrs. Harris heard must have been 'Hamley's Choice'.

"Do you agree, Mrs. Harris," pursued Sir Thomas, "that you are not always accurate in what you think you hear?"

"It was records," the witness remarked, discouraged, "I wasn't listening to the talking. I was reading. The programmes all sound the same, don't they?"

"That is not a matter for this court to decide . . ." Sir Thomas drew on the fronts of his gown and gazed aloft while the judge rebuked the laughter that followed this observation. Then he resumed, looking remarkably like a headmaster addressing a junior class. "Although you were not sure which day of the week it was, or which wireless programme you were listening to, are you satisfied beyond all doubt that the voice you heard in the next room before eight o'clock, was the same voice that you heard on the landing at eight-thirty, that is, after you switched off the programme you thought was 'Family Favourites'?"

"It was the same voice. I recognised it straight away."

"I suggest to you, that you can no more remember the one than the other?"

"It was the same voice . . ."

"Had the programme you were listening to ended?"

"Not quite."

"Did you hear the final signature tune?"

"I could hear it was going to end so I switched it off."

"How did you know the time was eight-thirty?"

"That was when I heard the crash. When he fell. Everyone says it was eight-thirty."

"I am not asking what others have said. Kindly pay attention to my question. What was your reason for thinking that the time was eight-thirty?"

"Because the programme ended at eight-thirty." Mrs. Harris resented Sir Thomas's attitude.

"Are you referring to the programme called 'Family Favourites' that was relayed the day before?"

"I thought it was 'Family Favourites'," Mrs. Harris objected.

"Do you admit that you were mistaken about this programme?"

"Well, we all make mistakes, don't we?" Mrs. Harris fidgeted.

"Do not question me. I am questioning you. Were you mistaken?"

Mrs. Harris gave way. "Yes."

Sir Thomas sat down. In two minutes he had shown Mrs. Harris to be of unreliable memory. He had punctured the Crown's principal witness.

Carlton Wilby rose to re-examine his witness.

"Do you frequently listen to such programmes as 'Family Favourites' and 'Hamley's Choice'?"

"Oh, yes. I like them."

"They are programmes which occur several times a week. Although you like them, you say you do not pay great attention to them?"

"Well, I like to be doing something while I'm listening."

"You do not listen closely, because these programmes take place continually?"

"Yes, I suppose that's why."

"But the sound of voices raised in argument and threats to kill, and the crash of bodies falling, are those things which you hear frequently?"

"Oh, no!"

"Would they impress themselves upon your mind?"

"Oh, yes! I'll never forget it as long as I live!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Harris." Carlton Wilby sat down.

There it was. You could believe Mrs. Harris. But you need not. The issue was open. Jan thought grimly that Carlton

Wilby was probably right. Adele was still with Justin at eighty-three, and Mrs. Harris had heard her. Why had Adele felt like killing Justin? What had Justin been saying?

Once more Jan sought the reason why Adele had refused to see Nanny again in prison; why she had denied him, and herself, the solace of Nanny's news and messages? His letters could not ask her, since she could not reply without giving him away. He could only reiterate his devotion—and add the mystery of her attitude to his other cares. If, as Nanny has assured him, Adele had understood his message, was it not better for her to see Nanny, than that they should have no news of one another at all? Nanny thought that Adele was wilful: if she could not see Jan, she would not see anyone. But Jan knew that Adele would not wilfully hurt her own heart. Her refusal to see Nanny was tantamount to her refusing to see Jan himself. Why?

Even if all went well, and Adele were acquitted, what had happened to their love?

And what of the verdict?

On the morning of the second day of the trial, Carlton Wilby called Justin's father. Mr. Forrest, senior, stood erect in the witness-box and waited, lifting a thin scholarly face from which the expression appeared to have been trodden out, as by a heavy boot. Justin's death had been a blow for which his father's conscience had been unprepared.

Jan listened intently to the history of Justin's marriage and the apparently callous fashion in which Adele had deserted Justin. From Mr. Forrest's answers to the prosecution's questions, it appeared that Justin's subsequent failure in life could be laid at the door of the indifferent cruelty with which Adele had treated him. It was not a pleasant story to hear.

The case for the Crown was now complete. Now it would be for the defence to examine the Crown's evidence; to disprove or dispute it; or to present it in such a light that it lay open to an altogether different interpretation. It was not for the defence to prove that Adele was innocent but to establish that the prosecution had not satisfied the jury by their evidence that she was guilty.

As regards calling Adele into the witness-box, Sir Thomas had been in something of a quandary. In calling her, he exposed her to the cross-examination of the prosecution. In not calling her, since it was now the law that a prisoner could give evidence on his own behalf, he exposed the defence to the inference that it had something to hide. Adele herself had been apathetic and had left her counsel to decide. It was with rising confidence now that Sir Thomas called Adele.

The spectators listened to the pretty fastidious voice that was alleged to have threatened murder; studied the hand, now resting upon the book in oath, that was alleged to have murdered; and reserved their judgment.

Sir Thomas's opening questions sign-posted clearly the road that Adele's answers should take, and she followed it unhesitatingly. She adhered to everything that she had said. She was not with Justin when he died. He had been asking her to return to him, and she had refused. Sir Thomas came to the heart of the matter.

"In your husband's letter," he queried, "there is the statement, 'I did not wish or expect you to have any further interest in me.' This refers to the previous occasion you saw him, on May the second. Is this true?"

"If he felt like that," Adele replied, "he didn't say so."

"Did he indicate then, that he wished you to return to him?"

"He wanted me to use my capital to buy him a farm."

"Did he expect you to join him in this venture?"

"I assumed so."

"Did his attitude lead you to assume so?"

"Yes . . ." in an effort to lend conviction, Adele added, "he said 'we could buy a farm.'" Adele believed it now. She could not remember what Justin had actually said. Probably if she had volunteered to go back to him, he would have agreed.

"Is this statement in his letter true, that he did not wish you to have any interest in him?"

"No."

"Why do you think he wrote that phrase?"

"Pride?" Adele suggested.

"Do you think that your husband's pride would not allow him to admit in a letter that you had rejected him?"

"It's the only reason I can think of."

Sir Thomas held up Justin's letter.

"Did you know about this letter while you were having your last conversation with your husband? Did he mention to you that he had written you a letter?"

"No."

"You knew nothing about it?"

"No."

"In this letter, your husband states that he intends to cite your lover in his divorce case. Did he state that intention to you in words, while you were talking?"

"No, he didn't." Adele had decided now that she must not admit that she had anything against Justin.

"Did he tell you that he expected to be in possession of your lover's name within a few hours?"

"He didn't say that." Technically, at least, it was true.

"Did he hold back from you the contents of this letter?"

"Apparently."

"Did he keep from you the existence of the letter, although it was then in his pocket?"

"I knew nothing about the letter. . . ."

Sir Thomas had made his point. A doubt had been cast upon the main issue of the motive advanced by the Crown for the murder. Adele had never seen Justin's letter. In theory, she need not have known the contents. That theory could neither be proved nor disproved, since the only witness was dead. Of all the remaining substance of Adele's statement, nothing else was as vital.

When Sir Thomas had completed his examination-in-chief, Carlton Wilby began his cross-examination of Adele with the subject of Justin's letter.

"In his letter," Carlton Wilby opened calmly, "your husband refers to your infidelity. You do not deny that he knew about this?"

"He knew about it."

"What was his attitude?"

"He wanted a divorce."

"You have just told this court that he wanted you to go back to him?"

"That was before he knew."

"You have said that he was still asking you to go back to him on the night he died; after, from the evidence of his letter, he knew that you were unfaithful?"

"If I wouldn't go back to him, he wanted a divorce."

"He would have taken you back?" Carlton Wilby expressed gentle surprise. "Even though he had just written that he wanted nothing more to do with you, or your child by another man?"

"Yes, he would!" Adele declared defiantly.

"It was the attitude of a man who had no pride?"

Adele did not answer. She herself had suggested that Justin was proud.

"Would you say that your husband had no pride?" Carlton Wilby pressed.

"I don't know."

"Please answer me. Would you say that he had any pride?"

"I have answered you. I don't know."

"Then why did you suggest that your husband was too proud to admit in his letter that you had rejected him?"

Adele was defeated. She could think of no reply.

"Are you saying what suits you?"

"No," Adele murmured weakly.

"Please remember that you are on oath to speak the truth," Carlton Wilby gave her no time to recover. "Your husband's written words are, 'You seem concerned to keep this man's name a secret.' Do you still deny that, although your husband had written you a letter stating that he intended to name your lover in the divorce court; that although this letter was reposing in his pocket while you were talking to him before he died; that the subject of that letter was not raised between you?"

"I did not know about the letter."

"That is not the question. Was the burden of your argument with your husband, the fact that your husband was threatening to

make public the name of this man whom you are trying to shield?"

"It was not."

"Why do you not name your lover in this case?"

Sir Thomas stood up. "My lord," he interposed, "I object to my friend's question. It has no bearing upon the case."

Carlton Wilby contended, "I submit, my lord, that in the defendant's reasons for not naming her lover, lie the answer to what took place on the night Justin Forrest died."

Carlton Wilby was right. But it was not the law. The judge instructed Adele, "You need not answer the question."

"You did not wish your lover's name to be made public," Carlton Wilby continued imperturbably. "I am not asking why." Abruptly, his voice chilled. "But I suggest to you that your husband was threatening to name your lover publicly, and that you were determined that he should not do so?"

"That's not true!" Adele flashed. "True, or not, she was fighting."

"You are determined that his name shall not be known?"

"Is there anything wrong in that?"

"Answer my question! Are you determined that there shall be no scandal attached to your lover's name?"

Adele drew herself up. "I am."

"What were you arguing about with your husband?"

"We were talking about his future. He wanted me to lend him money."

"Were you aware that your husband wanted to know the name of your lover?"

"Yes, but we were not discussing it then."

"Were you afraid that he would find out?"

"I did not wish it. I was not afraid."

"In your statement, did you say that you had not told your lover that your husband was still living?"

"That is true."

"Why did you not tell him?"

"Because I didn't want to."

"Were you afraid of your lover finding out that you had a husband?"

"Not afraid. I saw no need to tell him. I had not seen my husband for years."

"On the night of his death, did you feel that you would do anything to keep your husband from obtaining the name of your lover?"

"I was prepared to meet him privately on the matter."

"A few moments ago, you told this court that you were discussing the question of money, and not of whether your husband was trying to obtain the identity of your lover. Which is the truth?"

"We were talking about money. He thought he would get damages from a divorce. I offered him money."

"In his letter to you, your husband implies that on the occasion of his first visit to you, you refused to lend him money. Was that so?"

"I changed my mind."

"Were you not offering your husband money to keep him quiet on the subject of his naming your lover in his divorce case?"

"It was to make a new start."

"Was your husband prepared to accept your offer of money?"

"Yes, he was."

"You were offering your husband money, and he was prepared to take it. Do you say that this discussion constituted an argument?"

"We were not on friendly terms."

Adele felt that this reply did her no good. Indeed, she wondered whether her whole story sounded a tissue of lies. Her brain, agile and determined though it was, could not determine in advance the direction of Carlton Wilby's questions. She felt that she was being led blindfold into a maze from which she would never get out. Her knees were trembling, her hands were icy, her head was hot inside. But her heart was cold. She would go on into the maze, and take this man, this whole court with her. She was not the only one who had to get out of it, if she were to be convicted.

Adele's cross-examination continued into the morning of the third day. At the last, she knew herself to be trapped, entangled in a hopeless mesh of lies and half-lies that merely harmed her cause and threw doubt upon the few things she had said that were true. No one, she was sure, would believe her. They would believe that she had killed Justin because he was going to give away Jan. Like an animal waiting for the *coup de grâce*, she stood in the box and hung her head, waiting for the end. She was too tired to realise that the cross-examination was over.

Carlton Wilby sat down and Sir Thomas stood up. He raised one point only.

"Mrs. Forrest, you have stated that you were prepared to meet your husband privately on the matter of his obtaining—and presumably making public—the name of your lover?"

"Yes." Adele could not get her voice above a whisper.

"That was your intention?"

"Yes."

"Did you *say* that you would meet your husband privately on the matter? Or did you merely intend to say it, if the matter were raised?"

"I intended to settle it privately if I could."

"It was your intention?"

"Yes."

"You did not ask your husband in words?"

"No."

Sir Thomas had taken Adele by the hand and led her out of the maze . . . he had known all the time, where she was. There was still hope.

Sir Thomas called Mrs. Willis, the baby-sitter, his last witness. Mrs. Willis confirmed that Adele had come home in a taxi at twenty minutes past nine; and that she had said that she met the man she referred to as her 'husband', at eight-thirty, but had not stayed with him because she was not feeling well. Adele had not looked well. Mrs. Willis had given her a drink and some aspirins.

"That is Mrs. Forrest's case," concluded Sir Thomas. The case for the defence was closed.

Carlton Wilby began the closing speech for the prosecution. . . .

To Adele, it seemed that Carlton Wilby's words were prising open those compartments of her being where she had stored away her heart and its desperate record. He was forcing her to ask of herself those questions that were now being put to the jury.

"The evidence has shown," Carlton Wilby was arguing mellifluously, "that Mrs. Forrest is a woman with a secret, and of a secretive nature. She had a husband, but she did not tell her lover. She had a lover, but she would not give his name to her husband. So determined is she to guard her lover's identity, that she has challenged society to find out, if it can. And she has succeeded. We do not know who he is. But we do know the lengths to which Mrs. Forrest will go to keep her secrets."

Carlton Wilby was suggesting that Adele would murder rather than yield her secret.

He was not asking why: that was the forbidden question. But Adele was asking herself why? Why had she guarded Jan's name?

Because Adele had loved Jan. But Jan did not love her. She had guarded his wishes at the risk of her life. But Jan would see her die rather than stand by her. He had allowed her to go through this torment, this hell, rather than raise his voice to save her. Adele had protected Jan, but he had not protected her. He had protected that other woman, who was his wife. His love was not true, had never been true. He had betrayed her.

Betrayal: it was the knife-thrust into the heart, that demands death as its avenging, no less.

Adele's heart was opened now, wounded beyond recovery. Why had she sheltered Jan? There was no reason. Jan had betrayed her. She would betray Jan. His wife should know that, once, Jan had loved Adele and had given her his son. . . .

"All the evidence," Carlton Wilby was saying, "points to the one conclusion: that Mrs. Forrest was not speaking the truth when she says that she was not with her husband when he met his death. It is not true that she was at the Alexandra at eight-thirty. She lied——"

Somewhere in Adele's mind a door slammed. A woman was screaming. She stood up.

"I did not lie," she said clearly. "I was there at eight-thirty. I was with Lord Cluer."

Jan saw the headlines. They streamed across his mind in neon letter-press: 'Last-minute drama! Mr. X named! Lord Cluer in the witness-box'.

Jan was not among these spectators to save himself from headlines. He was there because he had hoped to save Adele by his silence. That hope was gone. Now, or later, he would be called; it made no difference. He rose amid the goggling crowd.

"I am here," Jan said.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

AN INTENSE SILENCE FELL UPON THE COURT when, after an amount of legal confabulation and a lengthy adjournment, Sir Thomas Portland called Jan into the witness-box. The silence went deeper than the mere act of listening. It calmed even the inward chatter of personal preoccupations. In that silence, nothing was heard or considered but Jan's voice, taking the oath.

Adele wept.

At the sight of Jan, her love had blazed into life again; and with it came the intuition of her folly. She could not look at him. She knew his eyes were upon her, and she could not meet them because they held no condemnation of her ruination of them both.

"Where had you arranged to meet Mrs. Forrest?" began Sir Thomas, after the preliminaries.

"In the foyer of the Alexandra restaurant." Jan's voice was as firm and strong as Sir Thomas's.

"At what time did you arrive there?"

"At approximately eight-thirty."

Adele could not disbelieve it, yet she had been so certain that Jan arrived after she did.

"Was Mrs. Forrest in the foyer when you arrived?"

"I did not see her."

"What did you do then?"

"I had a drink at the bar. . . ."

"It adjoins the foyer?"

"Yes. . . ."

"From the bar, could you see who arrived in the foyer?"

"No. After a drink, I went back to the foyer."

"Was Mrs. Forrest there?"

"She was not."

"What was the time?"

"I couldn't say exactly. Approaching a quarter to nine."

"What did you do then?"

"There are two entrances to the restaurant. I went across to the back entrance to see if there had been any mistake, and if Mrs. Forrest was waiting there. She was not. I spoke to the liftman, who was an acquaintance." Jan did not glance at Adele. "We chatted a minute or two. I went back to the foyer, and Mrs. Forrest was there."

"What was the time then?"

"About ten minutes to nine."

"Could she have been waiting there several minutes?"

"She could. I might have missed her."

"Could she have been in the powder-room between the time when you went for a drink and the time when you found her in the foyer?"

"She could have been." Jan tried not to betray the sudden hope that surged through him. He had never thought of the powder-room. Adele's manner had convinced him that she was late and that she was hiding something. Never, in his subsequent deliberations, had Jan thought of the powder-room as the alibi for Adele that he himself could not, dared not provide.

"Did you ask Mrs. Forrest why she had kept you waiting?"

"I would not ask any woman that."

"Lord Cluer, why have you not come forward to assist this case by stating what you knew of Mrs. Forrest's movements on the evening in question?"

"Because I couldn't state with certainty what time she arrived. I didn't wish my evidence to cast a doubt upon the matter."

"Do you realise that your absence has cast more doubt than anything you have said in evidence?"

Carlton Wilby stood up. "M'lord, I object. My learned friend's question is for the jury to answer, not the witness."

"I agree, Mr. Wilby," replied the judge. "I cannot allow the question."

"I wish to answer it, my Lord," Jan put in obdurately. "I agree that my evidence is open to doubt. My silence proved nothing."

The judge's silence was Jan's rebuke. Sir Thomas resumed his examination.

"Are you married, Lord Cluer?"

"I am."

"Is that why you have not come forward in this case?"

"I have given my reasons."

"Will you say that the fact that you are married, has nothing to do with your not having come forward?"

"That is the truth."

"Thank you, Lord Cluer."

Sir Thomas sat down. He knew the disposition of juries. He was confident that the jury would cling to a conviction that Jan was thinking rather of his wife when he kept silent, than of any harm his evidence might do to Adele. The jury would consider that Jan had more to hide from his wife than he had to hide from them.

Carlton Wilby recognised the challenge. In cross-examination, he asked Jan:

"Will you repeat why you did not come forward, Lord Cluer?"

"As I have said, because I did not wish to cast any doubts upon the time of Mrs. Forrest's arrival at the Alexandra."

"I suggest that it was because you knew beyond all doubt, that Mrs. Forrest was late—twenty minutes late—for her appointment with you?"

"I was in doubt about what time she arrived."

"You did not wish to be questioned upon the subject?"

"I admit, I did not."

"You agree, that it is possible that she was late?"

"I could not be certain."

"Did you think she was late?"

"I didn't know."

"I am asking you, at the time of your appointment, did you consider that Mrs. Forrest was late?"

Jan hesitated. Would he have been searching for Adele unless he had thought she was late?

"Did you think she was late? Be very careful in your reply, Lord Cluer."

Jan answered at length, "I thought so."

Adele lost the thread of what followed. She knew now that what Nanny had tried to tell her was true, that Jan could not give evidence because his evidence might go against her. Not because of Lorely, and the scandal. Because of Adele. Every veiled allusion in his letters became clear to her. His silence had been proof, not of his betrayal, but of his love. It was she, who had betrayed Jan's love.

They were calling her again to go into the witness-box. With shaking legs, she did as she was bidden. She had dealt herself a death-blow and the life seemed to be draining from her. She could no longer stand in the box. She was being given water to drink. She was allowed to sit down to answer the questions. But she no longer cared whether she lived or died. Her life was Jan's love. And she had killed it.

She heard Sir Thomas asking her, "When you arrived at the Alexandra, where did you go?"

Adele could hardly remember now. But there was a time in her life, long ago, when she had always gone first to the power-room. Someone had mentioned that.

"I went to the powder-room," she answered mechanically.

"How long were you there?"

Adele shook her head. "I don't remember."

"You might have been there some time? As long as a quarter of an hour?"

Adele nodded wordlessly.

"You spent some time in the powder-room. You do not remember how long?"

Sir Thomas's will seemed to Adele to be stronger than her own. "No," she agreed. Sir Thomas sat down.

Somehow, Carlton Wilby's cool tones seemed to be less tiring to Adele than the batteries of Sir Thomas. It was hard now to remember that Carlton Wilby was her enemy.

"Why did you not state before that you went to the powder-room, Mrs. Forrest?"

"No one asked me," she answered wearily.

"I suggest to you that the power-room has only just occurred to you as being a plausible and useful excuse for your non-appearance at eight-thirty?"

"No." Adele scarcely understood the question. But she never agreed with anything Carlton Wilby suggested.

"Was there an attendant in the power-room?"

"No. I don't know."

The judge peered down upon the bench. "Is there an attendant in the power-room of the Alexandra, Mr. Wilby?"

"There is not, my Lord."

Adele was unaware, as she returned to the dock, that her distress and the collapse of her conscious defence had done more for her than any word of hers throughout the trial.

Carlton Wilby was not a rhetorician. In his view, an examination of the evidence conducing to a conviction of murder did not call for soap-box oratory or the language of poets. His closing speech for the prosecution cooled the fever of the court-room considerably. It belittled the suggestion that because of the mystery enveloping the private life of the prisoner, the case was sensational or in any way different from other charges of murder that had been tried in the past. Murder was the unlawful taking of life. It was the business of the jury to decide, from the evidence, whether Justin Forrest's life had been taken by Mrs. Forrest; and, if the charge were proved, to find her guilty of murder.

Carlton Wilby again counselled the jury to eliminate from their

minds any apparently sensational atmosphere surrounding the withholding of Lord Cluer's connection with the case during the greater part of the trial; and the circumstances in which he had finally been called upon to state the facts as he knew them. The jury were to consider the evidence as to why Lord Cluer had tried to withhold these facts; and what bearing those facts had upon the evidence that had already been given.

Carlton Wilby then proceeded to examine Lord Cluer's evidence. Lord Cluer had stated that he did not know whether Mrs. Forrest was late at the Alexandra restaurant. But he thought she was late. There was no suggestion in his mind, or excuse to him on her part, that she was in the powder-room during the period when he thought that she had not yet arrived. From reasons of courtesy, Lord Cluer refrained from asking if or why Mrs. Forrest was late. From the evidence of Mrs. Harris, it was conclusive that Mrs. Forrest was, in fact, late; and she naturally did not wish to call attention to the fact, or desire to discuss it unless she was called upon to do so by Lord Cluer, which she was not. Mrs. Forrest did not arrive at the Alexandra at eight-thirty, because, at that moment, she was with her husband on the landing outside Mrs. Harris's flat. And she was threatening to kill him.

All the segments of the puzzle fell into place; none seemed to be missing. They completed the picture that Adele was with her husband at eight-thirty; he died; it was to Adele's advantage that he died. There was direct evidence that she had lied in stating her relations with her husband. The defence were seeking to question the interpretation of Justin's last letter to his wife. But in the direct testimony of the written word, those relations were not what Adele had said they were. She had lied about them. She had sought to establish an alibi. That alibi had not been proved. . . .

When Carlton Wilby sat down, the jury saw that the scale against Adele was sagging heavily. The other scale was empty.

It was half-past three. The emotional temperature was cold when Sir Thomas Portland rose to begin his closing speech for the defence. The jury were trying not to think about cups of tea.

They required warming, and Sir Thomas knew it. He hoisted his gown about him and threw back his handsome head:

"May it please your lordship; members of the jury——" began Sir Thomas, "my time has come to present to you the defence to this charge of wilful murder against Mrs. Forrest. You have heard the prosecution's case. You have been urged to regard this as a very ordinary case, in no way sensational, in no way mysterious. . . ." the last word rolled round the court. "If there were no mystery in this case, my task would be much less simple. I do not have to prove to you that Mrs. Forrest is innocent. I am here to show you that the prosecution have not, by their evidence, proved that she is guilty. That they have been unable to do so, is owed to the fact that there is not one aspect of this extraordinary and—however regrettable it may be—sensational case that is not enveloped in mystery. Across every vital fact lies a veil of mystery. By merely encouraging you to do so, the prosecution cannot tear away these veils.

"Mrs. Forrest has been presented to you as a secretive woman. She has sought to screen her private life from the public gaze. That, if she wishes to do so, is her privilege. Her reasons, also, it is her privilege to keep secret. This is not a court for the examination of the eternal triangle. The fact that Mrs. Forrest had a secret that she guarded jealously, does not mean that she is a murderess. There is not one shred of evidence to support the prosecution's suggestion that Mrs. Forrest's feelings on this subject were so strong that they drove her to commit murder. And it is evidence that we are dealing with, not suggestions, nor the solution of mysteries.

"What is the evidence that the prosecution have put forward to justify this serious assumption that Mrs. Forrest murdered her husband? You have a letter, written by the deceased to the defendant. This letter is assumed to connote the relations existing between husband and wife during their last meeting; although Mrs. Forrest had not seen the letter, and was unaware of its existence. I want to make it clear to you, members of the jury, that this letter has been put forward to you as evidence that Mrs. Forrest was aware of the intentions it expressed, although, I

repeat, she had not seen the letter, and according to her evidence no mention was made between the defendant and the deceased either of the letter itself, or of the matters it dealt with.

"As evidence that Mrs. Forrest was with her husband when he died and not, as she states, on her way to a dinner engagement, the prosecution have brought forward a witness, Mrs. Harris. . . ."

A note of magnificent scorn invaded Sir Thomas's tone. By the time he had dealt with Mrs. Harris and her evidence, the jury could scarcely be blamed for discrediting the most obvious verities of Mrs. Harris's existence.

"It is for you, members of the jury," Sir Thomas continued scathingly, "to decide whether you care to determine the issue of this terrible accusation upon the evidence of Mrs. Harris, whose memory—it is one of the few things about which there is no mystery—is so unreliable that she is not clear as to the days of the week, or the hours or nature of the wireless programmes she is listening to."

Sir Thomas dealt with Adele's alibi. "That alibi," he admitted, "has not been proved. Neither has it been disproved. Like so many circumstances in this case, it is open to doubt.

"It may be, members of the jury, that you prefer to accept the evidence of Mrs. Harris. That decision is yours. You may decide that at eight-thirty, Mrs. Forrest was with her husband on the landing outside Mrs. Harris's door, and that she did say to him, 'I'll kill you!' Those words in themselves are not evidence that Mrs. Forrest carried out her threat and that she did kill her husband by pushing him through the broken banisters. No one was present at that moment. No one saw what happened. No one heard what caused her to utter those words. It could be that Mrs. Forrest's threat was the bravado of a frail woman confronting a man almost twice her weight, who had first threatened her. It has been said in evidence that he hated her. There may have been a struggle. There may have been an accident. I repeat, no one knows. It is a mystery."

Sir Thomas dealt in detail with the account Adele had given of her last conversation with Justin. "The prosecution have

sought to establish that Mrs. Forrest silenced her husband by killing him because he was threatening her in the same manner as he threatened her in his letter. Is this proved? Remember, she had never seen or heard about the letter. It could be that her husband stated his intentions in a letter because he did not wish to raise them in a discussion. That also is not proved.

"There is nothing in any of these assumptions and suggestions," Sir Thomas claimed, "to establish that Mrs. Forrest was a woman who harboured the will to kill her husband, nor is there any firm evidence that she did kill him.

"Members of the jury, this whole case is veiled, shrouded in mystery. You are not here to attempt to solve a mystery. A court is a place where the clouds of mystery are dispersed by the cold light of proved facts. It is for you to decide whether the prosecution have proved, beyond all reasonable doubt, by their evidence, that Mrs. Forrest was with her husband at eight-thirty; and that she pushed him to his death, knowing, and intending that he should die. There must be no doubt in your minds. If you think that it is possible that she did it, and equally possible that she did not do it; if there is any mystery still clouding your clear conviction that Mrs. Forrest wilfully killed her husband: you cannot convict her. You must be reasonably certain. If you are not certain, you will find Mrs. Forrest not guilty."

The court adjourned for tea. It was Friday evening. At half-past five, the judge remarked that he was sure the jury would prefer a late sitting to the awful prospect of being locked up until Monday morning; and began his summing up.

Jan remained in his place. By now, the news of his involvement in the case would be common property. His name was being torn apart in the homes of his relations and friends; in the offices of the *Record*; wherever anyone who knew him had got hold of the newspaper editions that would be rushed out as the trial proceeded. Nanny would be watching from St. Albans. Everyone would know what had happened. Would Lorely have heard? She never read the evening papers, or listened to the news. Was there anyone who would take it upon themselves to say anything to her? Jan doubted it.

The whole thing was so calamitous that it lent Jan the strength of disaster. It was no use leaving this court and going to Lorely before he knew the verdict. Nothing could be settled without that. The forces of love, duty and logic, all compelled him to stay where he was until it was over.

The jury turned relieved eyes upon the judge as he began his charge to them. For three days the pendulum swing of the evidence had carried them now to this side, now to that. They had been counselled, exhorted, cajoled, charged with a grave and heavy duty to convict, to acquit—to do what? They ought not to be confused, but they were. At last, they were to be steadied. The dizzy swinging would cease. They would know where they were.

The jury had been reminded by the judge of the charge against the prisoner. Now even counsels for the prosecution and for the defence, those confident gentlemen, were to be put in their proper places. "Members of the jury," his lordship was adjuring them gently, "there is nothing new or, of necessity, criminal in two people wishing to withhold from public scrutiny the fact of an adulterous liaison. But where the death occurs of a person closely concerned in that liaison, that person being the third member of what Sir Thomas somewhat picturesquely terms 'the eternal triangle', the circumstances of that death are liable to examination as possibly bearing out a criminal intention.

"Before I continue, I want to clear your minds of any uncertainty that may have been aroused by Sir Thomas Portland's allusions to the mysteries of this case. According to Sir Thomas, this case is enveloped in veils, clouds, shrouds of mystery. I will not attempt to emulate his romantic delivery. But he says it is all very mysterious, and you are to restrain your judgment on that account. Members of the jury, it is rare that there is an eye-witness to the crime of murder. I am not saying that a murder has been committed in this case. I am not saying that at all. But murders are not committed in the accusing light of unmysterious circumstances. The evidence of murder is commonly circumstantial. You are not being asked to tear away veils. I am not here to tear them away for you.

"You have here a quantity of evidence. It is for you to examine this evidence, carefully, patiently, and in a commonsense manner, and to adjudge from it where the greater weight of probability lies. If, by the weight of evidence, an event is regarded as probable, that event is regarded as proved. That is the law. It is not proved, if the evidence leads you to consider that it is possible that an event took place, but equally possible that it did not. Between possibility and probability, a great gulf is fixed. If you think that the greater weight of probability lies with the facts as presented to you by the prosecution, it will be your duty to convict. If you think that the weight of the evidence lies equally between one possibility and another, you will acquit the prisoner. In your examination of the evidence, you have the law to guide you. You will take the law from me——"

There was one matter in all the patient sifting of the evidence that followed, in which the listening court took an especial interest. That was his lordship's opinion of Mrs. Harris. . . .

His lordship came out on Mrs. Harris's side. He agreed with the witness's inference that programmes of records, each record being introduced by a commentary to which it might be pleasing but was not essential to listen, sounded similar in effect. The witness had been frank on this point. She had admitted that she was not listening closely, and that she was reading a book. Her attitude was that of an honest and sensible person. His lordship saw no objection to accepting her account of the untoward happenings she had heard. He reminded the jury that Mrs. Harris had acted with commendable promptitude and commonsense both when she discovered the body, and after the police came. . . .

So it went on. Jan listened, and thought that here were all that remained of his story and Adele's. The bed, the passion, Adele's jealousy, the difficult loyalty to Lorely; all had cooled into this metal of experience, these grams of evidence, now being deposited with cool and delicate precision, now to one side, now to the other, of the scales of Adele's life.

The jury retired at ten minutes past seven. By a quarter to nine, they had made little progress. This period of time had

included the consumption of thirty-six ham sandwiches, twenty-four cups of tea, and the greater part of a four-pound plum cake. It had allowed a quantity of argument; and a brush with a lady member who did not believe in capital punishment. But they were no nearer their corporate verdict.

The jury had vindicated Mrs. Harris. They had decided that Adele was with Justin on the landing at eight-thirty. There they stuck. They raised their voices. They were tired, out of order, and more than a little uncertain.

"You can't say she pushed him. She may have felt like pushing him."

"You can't say she felt like it. There's no evidence. Except the letter."

"The letter's not evidence of that."

"Well, she was done for, so long as her husband was alive. He was going to split on her."

"She didn't know it. There's no proof she knew it."

"If she didn't know he was going to, she must have known he might or could. It stands to reason."

"Whose reason?"

"That's not how I see it."

"We don't know how he was acting towards her. After all, he was a misogynist."

"What's a misogynist?"

"A woman-hater." The foreman of the jury spoke with some authority. He was an insurance agent; of a class whom the other members had learned to regard with respect. For, to be sure, you got nothing out of insurance agents if you died; and precious little if you lived.

"He may have pushed her first," the foreman added.

"He wouldn't have got his damages," remarked the capital punishment lady.

"I don't say he tried to push her over. Started a fight. And then slipped."

"If there was an accident, why didn't she stay and say so? Why do a bunk?"

"Lost her head?"

"She could have explained afterwards."

"Too scared."

"She's the sort that loses her head. Look how she gave him away in court."

"That's got nothing to do with the case."

"It gave her away, didn't it? I say, it fitted in with her record: she deserted her husband, slept with a married man, had a baby by him. Fought tooth-and-nail to keep it dark. Then, at the last minute, she changes her mind, loses her head, rats on him; call it what you like. What's a push, to add to that lot?"

"Ladies . . . gentlemen . . . we are straying from the issue," the foreman arbitrated. "We'd got to the point where we were deciding whether the evidence is strong enough for us to be sure that the prisoner meant it, when she said she'd kill him. If she meant it, it's a lot more than coincidence that he died directly after. We can't let ourselves be prejudiced by what we think of the prisoner's morals. She's a woman. She's got a baby. We're not going to convict her because he was born out of wedlock."

The jury were twelve ordinary, adequately—though not totally—honest citizens. They had never been driven to an extreme whose only release was murder. They could not envisage such an extreme. In their deepest hearts, however they had been counselled to disregard any such appeal to the emotions, they were not anxious to retire to their comfortable safe beds this night, having consigned the youthful prisoner to the death cell and her infant son to a motherless future. That was, unless there was no shred of doubt that they must do so. And there was doubt.

At twelve minutes past nine, the jury filed back into the court. The foreman faced the judge.

"Members of the jury," asked the clerk of the court, "have you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We cannot agree on our verdict, my Lord." The foreman had flushed. All this time and money as good as wasted. . . .

"If you are given further time," the judge leaned towards the jury box, "say another half an hour . . .?"

"I don't think we shall agree, my Lord. . . ."

The jury were discharged. Below the judge, there was a leaning together of legal heads, followed by murmurings and head-shakings and tappings of documents in emphasis. Then more head-shakings, and a general subsiding. Carlton Wilby stood up.

"My Lord, I am instructed by the director of public prosecutions, who does not propose to offer any evidence if there is a fresh trial."

The judge folded his spectacles and closed his hands over them. He leaned forward and addressed Adele.

"Adele Forrest, the jury have not been able to agree on their verdict, and no further evidence is going to be offered against you in a subsequent trial. You are discharged."

Adele sat motionlessly in the dock. All around her arose a sudden roar of voices, feet, movement. Doors were being opened. Adele could walk, if she wished, down the steps of the dock into the court, and out with the crowd through any of the doors; down the corridors and into the open street.

She was free to go.

Where?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

LORELY WAS ACQUIRING THE HABIT OF GOING TO BED EARLY. Thus she shortened the weary evenings after dinner was over and Jan had gone to his study. Sleep led her swiftly and painlessly into the next day and its activities. There was nothing to do at the end of the day. At nightfall Lorely's memories walked, like ghosts.

Louie was preparing her bed.

Lorely was lighting the candles, all of them, rousing her tiny armies of fire against the darkness. They held life, the candle-flames, they were company for her.

She went to the french windows and opened them and stepped on to the small balcony. The warm night air caressed her shoulders and arms under their thin veiling of black chiffon.

She felt, rather than saw, the diamond pendant at her throat flash its challenge to the feebly distant street lamps. Down the Mall and here and there across the park the illumined trees shook out their leafy canopies. But the balcony lay in shadow. In her black dress, Lorely stood there for a moment; and mourned dimly for the fullness of the summer night, and for her own beauty and its sterility.

"Is there anything more, m'lady?"

Lorely turned towards the room. "No, thank you, Louie."

Louie had switched off the bedside lamp and come to the front of the dais. She stood there a moment hesitantly. Lorely was aware of some incommunicable tension in her servant. She groped towards its cause. "Yes, Louie? Do you want something?"

Louie hesitated. "No, m'lady," she said finally, "thank you, m'lady. . . ."

Having held her tongue, Louie went out.

Lorely closed the windows. As she came into the room, she thought vaguely that the candles were like the flares of old that burned to keep out wild beasts. The purple shadows pressed inwards, but they could not break the inner radiance. It was as though by this simple rite, Lorely drove her secret unhappiness into that outer darkness.

The flames leaned towards her as upon some unseen draught. Jan was standing by the purple curtain.

It was so long since Jan had come into her room at night that Lorely felt momentarily embarrassed. She suppressed an impulse to ask him why he was there at all: after all, he was still her husband. She saw that, far from being approachable, his expression was cold and stony. Indeed, he looked terrible. Yet it did not occur to Lorely that he might be ill.

Neither of them moved. She waited for him to speak.

"I have you seen the papers?" he asked.

"I saw this morning's," she answered defensively. "Why, what's happened?"

"The nine o'clock news? Did you listen?"

"I was still at dinner. Besides, you know I never listen. Why?"

"I just wondered. . . ." He seemed to be coming in for a chat, after all. He went over to one of the white chairs and sat down.

"There was a murder trial," Jan said ruminatively. He did not look at Lorely. "Have you been reading it?"

"Oh, that." Lorely stepped on the faint hope that had sparked at the sight of Jan. He wasn't—well, in that mood. He'd forgotten her, as a wife. She went over to the long mirror and studied herself. "A woman murdered her husband, didn't she?" Lorely patted her hair. "She was having an *affaire* with someone, but they hushed it up. They always do. Like those divorce cases, with unnamed women."

"What else did you read about it?"

"They couldn't find him, could they? The man? Mr. X?"

"No. . . ." Jan rubbed his face wearily. Lorely would have to be prepared before he could tell her who Mr. X was.

"What are you doing?" he enquired.

"I'm going to bed." Lorely regarded herself in the mirror with surprise. It was years since Jan had exhibited any interest in what she did.

"It's early."

"It'll be ten before I get there." Lorely turned to face Jan. "What else is there to do?"

In the intense fire of the candle flames Lorely's skin glowed like living marble in which had been set the human eyes, darkly shining. With a shadowy stirring of her black draperies she came towards Jan.

"I've nothing to do," she repeated. She sat down on the couch opposite Jan. "My days are long."

Jan studied the downbent classical profile. She was a woman, fecund and beautiful, brought to loneliness and sterility. By him. "I've made you unhappy, haven't I?" he offered with difficulty. "You've no company."

One of her shoulders stirred. "If you're busy."

"You're lonely."

"But your work's important!" she objected loyally. "You must do it."

"If I weren't here at all, it wouldn't make much difference to you, would it?"

"How do you mean, if you weren't here?" In the face of the stranger who had once been her husband and her lover, Lorely sought some explanation and failed to find it.

"I mean," Jan's lips were dry, "if I were not here, were not living in this house at all or if you were living somewhere else, away from me, do you think you would be more lonely; more bored than you are now? What do I do for you?"

"I don't expect you to do anything. You don't have to feel that, you don't have to think of me."

"Wouldn't you be happier without me?" he asked bluntly.

"Without you?" Lorely stared at Jan. His manner rather than his words told her that he was removed from her by some happening that his mere bodily presence did not alter. Her Jan, whom she had loved, was not here. His question presented her imagination with no difficulty. "I am without you," she stated simply.

"You're not," Jan answered slowly. "I'm your husband."

"You're not my husband!" Lorely dared to say it. Now that Jan had at last given her a lead she found that she was prepared. She had already worked out her answers. "A husband's someone who loves his wife. You don't love me. You wouldn't notice if I wasn't here. You don't need me at all. You're not my husband and I'm not your wife."

"We're husband and wife in the eyes of society."

"Society!" she exclaimed. "Other people. What does it matter if they think we love each other when we don't? When you don't. If they knew we didn't, it wouldn't help us to know why, what's happened to us." Lorely's thoughts became confused. No one could tell her what had gone wrong: only Jan himself. "What did I do?" she asked pitifully, "won't you tell me?"

Lorely's unhappy face accused Jan. Her large bewildered eyes had filled with tears and she was trying to keep her lips from trembling. The magnitude of the wrong that he had done to her, yawned between them like an abyss. There seemed to be no way over it. He hovered on the brink of confession

and drew back. "I can't tell you!" he cried, springing to his feet. "I can't!"

In the great mirror Jan met his own image, ghastly and sunken-eyed above the bobbing spooks of the candle-flames. The room itself was nightmarish. It trapped him in a purple fog from which he felt he had to fight his way out and couldn't. He faced Lorely again. "Oh, God!" he cried out, "I can't tell you!"

"What can't you tell me?" Lorely forgot her own distress. She rose to her feet and stood for a moment, irresolutely, looking to where Jan stood in the middle of the room. "Darling, what is it?"

Jan went to pieces. "I'm 'Mr. X'," he said loudly. The ridiculous nature of the term escaped him. "The man in the trial, whom they called 'Mr. X'. It was me."

Lorely took a few steps towards Jan. She peered at him at first without comprehension. "'Mr. X'," she repeated vacantly. "But that was the man, they couldn't find, him, the father." Lorely broke off. "There was a baby," she realised slowly, "a little baby."

"He's mine," Jan said harshly, "my child."

"Your child," Lorely repeated. The implications were seeping into her mind like a mist. But she could only see one fact at a time. "It was a boy," she discovered, and pondered it. "How big is he?"

"Four months."

"Quite tiny, a tiny baby." Lorely could see him now, the baby, he was almost real. She went close to Jan and laid a wondering hand on his arm. "You've a son?"

Jan met the dark dazed eyes. "Forgive me," he said.

"You wanted a son."

"I'd no right to him."

The mist in Lorely's mind cleared slightly. She saw something else. "You've been unfaithful to me," she said, amazed, "with that woman in the trial. Did she kill her husband?"

"The jury disagreed. She was discharged."

"Then where is she now? Why aren't you with her?"

"She wouldn't see me." Even this memory seemed unreal to Jan at this moment. Only Lorely was real. "I came to you—Lorely, I never meant this to happen! Believe me, I didn't want you to know, to be hurt," in Jan's own ears, the plea sounded unavailing. "I would have done anything . . . but it's all come out, who I was, the whole story. That's why I wanted to know if you'd seen the papers."

"It's in the papers? About you and me?"

"Everything."

Now that it was out, Jan felt his control returning. With the abyss behind him, he felt that he and Lorely stood together upon firmer ground. He took her arm gently and guided her back to the couch. "Come and sit down," he said. Lorely went with him obediently. She seemed to be numbed, without pain. 'It's her lack of imagination,' he thought, 'it protects her. She can't picture any of it.'

Lorely sat down on the white couch. She felt Jan sit down beside her. The lamp he switched on shed a bright light around them. Only one thing was clear in her mind: Jan had a son. Vaguely she realised that other people knew about it, too, because Jan had said it was in the papers. The thought did not interest her. "Why didn't you tell me that you had a son?" she asked him, her tone mystified and reproachful. "You should have told me."

"I didn't want you to know."

"Why not?"

"Because if you knew, I should have had to leave you."

Lorely stared at Jan. "Then why did you go to someone else if you didn't want to leave me? I was here, I was your wife, I loved you. It wasn't my fault we couldn't have babies. We could have adopted one, quite a little baby, and he would have been a comfort to us, even if he wasn't ours."

Jan clenched his hands together and regarded them for a moment without speaking. It wounded him to the heart that Lorely should think he had betrayed her because she was childless. He wondered—and doubted—if there were any way by which he could simplify the complexities of his experience so

that she would not lay the blame entirely on her own childlessness? It seemed hopeless, but he had to try.

"My dear," he began, looking past her to the urn of purple and white flowers in the empty whitewashed hearth. "I didn't sit down and say to myself, 'I want to leave you. I want a child. I'm going to do this or that.' Something happened and I didn't realise at the time where it would all lead. I found Adele in a concentration camp. She was the only English person there, and I took her name and address. She lived in London. I went to see how she was getting on, and I found that her parents had been killed in an air-raid and she was alone, and very ill. I did what I could for her; and she came to depend on me. I found I couldn't leave her."

"You've just said you couldn't leave me."

"You depended on me, too." Jan turned his head to look at Lorely. Her eyes were fastened on his face as though he were giving her an instruction. She was trying to understand. He explained, "That's what I mean when I say that we're together in the eyes of society. We present—or did present—a united front. It was something that protected you, the fact that you were my wife. You had your position. So long as you were married to me, it was unassailable. I was not going to insult you by leaving you in the eyes of everyone who knew us, from Everett and Lena down to the servants. I wouldn't have you share my dishonour."

Jan got to his feet again and went over to the fireplace. He was swept with anger, not towards Adele who had given him away; but against the whole machine of publicity. "Father was right when he said 'you shouldn't make news'," he exclaimed bitterly. "It's throwing yourself to the mob! Surrendering your life, your most sacred griefs and loyalties to be torn apart by strangers who know nothing of who you are, or what they do to you by their uninformed imaginings. The Sunday papers are a national sport!" Jan calmed down. He continued more reasonably. "But I suppose it's fair. We live in a crowd. A decent marriage is our claim to seclusion. If it breaks down, we let in the rabble."

Lorely was not following what Jan was saying. She was struggling to say something herself. Jan watched the difficult thought surface in her blank bemused eyes.

"Dishonour," she repeated carefully, as though she clung to the associations that the word had revived. "But, Jan, I've been unfaithful, too, in my heart. With Jules. I was tempted. It says in the Bible, if you commit adultery in your thoughts, it's the same, really. It's sin. I'm no better than you."

The artless confession deepened Jan's sense of guilt. Suddenly he saw that Lorely was not thinking of herself, she was trying to help him, to share with him even his sins. He went over to her and sat down again beside her.

It seemed to Jan that the long years of their association ringed them round as they sat together; so that not even the momentous things that had happened outside themselves or his tearing consciousness of his love for Adele, reached this inner core of his life's betrayal and reckoning, or the pathetic illusory grandeur of this quiet room which, even though he did not like it, belonged, in a sense, to himself.

Jan turned his direct gaze on Lorely. He was discovering in her, for the first time, the simple goodness that existed beyond the maddening perplexities of her thoughts. She wished to serve, but her brain was too poor a servant. Only this crisis of her heart had given her the opportunity to show him, now that it was too late, her true self.

He touched her arm. "You are vastly better than I am," he said. "Your temptations are not sins. Or they're my sins. I haven't looked after you as I should. I've made you unhappy, tried to make you understand things that didn't interest you, to force you to my way of thinking. It wasn't fair. I should have attempted to see things your way. We've lived together for nearly twenty years and never even tried to understand each other. But it was my fault."

"Oh, no, Jan!" she protested. "We were happy, weren't we? I remember, you used to be so glad to get home, when you were on the *Record*, remember, you came down from Scotland, just to be home for three hours. Four o'clock in the morning. We

· raided the pantry for supper, and took it back to bed. I was happy! Perhaps you've forgotten?"

"I haven't forgotten. That was in 1932, in the autumn. It's a long time to have to go back, isn't it? But if I'd been different towards you, you wouldn't have had to go back fifteen years for your memories. You wouldn't be decorating a room to look like a castle, with a man like Jules Menier, and blaming yourself for committing mental adultery. I've failed you, Lorely. I'm telling you now, so that you won't sit in years to come, brooding about it, wondering what you did, or I did, to make everything go wrong. I could have made you happy. But I didn't try. The only thing I ever did was to try to shield you from knowing that I'd allowed myself to love someone else. That was because I loved you, too."

"You loved me? Even when you were unfaithful to me?" Lorely could hardly believe that it was Jan, sitting beside her, telling her that he loved her and looking, for the moment, like the Jan whom she used to know. She couldn't remember when it was that he'd last sat talking to her as an equal, as though he expected her to understand him. But she was understanding him! It was silence that she couldn't understand, not this uncomplicated speech.

"Why didn't we say all this before?" she cried futilely, "if we'd said how we felt, we would have stayed together. You might have told me about this other woman. We could both have helped her. Oh, Jan!" Lorely clutched his arm, "I know I'm not as clever as you are, I'll never understand all the things you know about. But if you'd talked to me like this, I could have tried. You don't have to understand someone, to love them, do you?"

"No." Jan stared past Lorely—and saw Adele, pinched and pale, twisting her thin fingers as she talked to him about the camp. Who was she? What had he ever understood of her true nature?

Jan brought his eyes back to Lorely's pleading distressed face. "You can love a stranger," he completed, "and not know why."

"Do you love her—this other woman?"

"I do."

"And you say you love me, too?"

"It's true."

"But—if you love both of us—why, then, you've got to chosel! And if—she's got your son—how can you stay with me? I've no son."

"My dear, it made no difference. I was going to stay with you. I put you first."

"Before your son?" There was wonderment behind the sadness in Lorely's eyes. "But that was a kind of sacrifice, wasn't it? Would you have done that for me?"

Jan kept his eyes lowered and did not answer.

"But you mustn't!" she protested. "I want you to have your son, someone to grow up and inherit all you have. It wasn't God's will that he should be ours. But I want you to have him! I'll divorce you, I can do that, can't I?"

Jan lifted a haggard face. "Oh, there are a million witnesses," he agreed. "They'll tear us both to pieces!" He sought some signs of comprehension of the fact in her face, but found none. She had no idea of what lay before them. "What will you do?" he implored. "I can't leave you alone in this great place!"

To his surprise, Jan saw a light of calm and pride grow in Lorely's eyes. "I'll stay here," she declared.

Lorely felt a kind of splendour growing round her. Something was happening to her at last. She stood up.

It was as though Lorely's memories were riding out of the past to keep her company; but they were no longer the dreaded ghosts of a dead love, they were alive and real again because Jan had said he loved her, even to the point of sacrifice.

The lonely shadows of the room seemed to be drawing Lorely towards them, away from the matter-of-fact circle of lamp-light in which she and Jan had been sitting. The clusters of candle were fire, burning in the black lake of the mirror. The candles were her guardians. Their world was her world and, within it, she was their queen. She felt her mourning draperies softly settling about her as she moved. Other women, too, had loved and lost. . . .

Lorely turned to where Jan was still watching her from the distant couch. She felt strong, inspired.

"This house is mine," she said proudly, "I want to stay here."

Jan was moved by the absurdity of Lorely's attitude, and by its pathetic bravado. She meant it. She would stay in this monstrous house, impervious to the outside world, growing more and more eccentric with the years until she became a little mad, an object of pity to her servants, and of derision to outsiders. Yet she was a normal woman, made for loving and earthy pleasures. A few children, an attentive husband, and she would have been like anyone else. Was this what drove women to the borderline, to be deprived of love by men like himself?

Jan sprang to his feet and went towards her. "You can't stay here!" he shouted, "you'll go mad! You must get away!"

Lorely drew herself up. Her eyes were perfectly sane. "This is my home. Where would I go?"

"You can't stay here by yourself!"

"You can't stay with me." For a moment, the reality of it pierced the mists of illusion. Lorely's voice trembled. "You've got to go."

"I don't want to leave you."

Lorely reached out her hand and touched Jan's cheek. "You look so tired," she said. "You mustn't think of me. You have other things to think of. Your son. His mother. You must leave me! You know you must."

In the simple statements, Jan saw clearly the true nature of Lorely's love for him. Her love was akin to that of a mother for its child: whatever he did, wherever he went, she would still love him, would want him to have what he desired, without reason and without question. It seemed to Jan that this was the final irony: that now the end had come to their life together they were closer than they had ever been.

Jan's gratitude spoke. "I've been mistaken in you," he said humbly. "I never knew, you're a wonderful woman."

Quick tears sprang to Lorely's eyes. It was the first deep praise she had ever received from Jan. His words carried away with them all the lonely perplexed years, the stupidities, the failures.

Redeemed, she expressed a thought that she might otherwise have withheld. Yet she knew, intuitively, that it was the truth. "It's like a story, isn't it?" she stammered, "you and me, and you having to leave me and not wanting to, and me making you go? The same as when they give up love for honour, in books? Only we're real. You could make a book about us, couldn't you?"

Despite the unshed tears, Lorely's eyes were rapt. It was apparent to Jan that she saw herself, at last, as the legendary heroine whose fortunes she had simulated for so long. Even though the ending of her story was not a happy one, the drama of it upheld her. Jan let her keep it.

"Yes," he agreed, with the wintry semblance of a smile, "we're better than any book."

"I'm giving you up, aren't I?" she implored. "For that other woman, and your baby? It's my sacrifice, for you?" A practical curiosity struggled against the heroics in her mind. "I want to see them," she said in a different voice. "Where are they? Won't they be waiting for you?"

Lorely's words broke the spell that had held fast Jan's own thoughts of Adele and the child. Now they stirred painfully into life, with needs that were urgent and frightening.

Jan saw again the face of the official at the prison entrance of the Old Bailey, who told him that Adele had refused to see him, that she had left the building.

He saw the flat as she must have found it when she got back; empty, perhaps disturbed by strangers, the papers on the mat folded over their travestied account of Adele's own story, her last-minute denouncement of Jan.

What had happened to Adele in that moment? What had cut them apart?

Suddenly Jan knew that something was happening to Adele. He felt her to be drifting from him, going ever farther from the hand that had tethered and loved her. The little flat, their life, their love, all were as an island of his past, floating irreclaimably out to sea.

Jan knew that he had to get there quickly.

"I must go," he said.

"Let me come with you! I want to see them." Lorely had no idea why, or what she would say or do when she got there. It was part of the drama that she, the discarded wife, should visit her husband's mistress. Besides, she wanted to see the baby.

Lorely turned and went swiftly to one of the concealed wardrobes. She pressed a knob and the doors slid silently into their grooves. A bright light in the interior showed her a line of dresses and mantles.

Lorely would not hasten over what she was going to wear. A swift exaltation burned in her at the part that she was going to play. All her life she would live secure in the knowledge that Jan had loved her and that she had made him give her up for the sake of another woman's child.

Lorely's hand hovered and withdrew and hovered again. She drew down from the rod a cloak of black velvet. It had a hood and was lined with white satin.

Before the dark candle-lit mirror, Lorely adjusted the black cloak about her shoulders and drew the hood over her hair. The coif-like rim of the white satin lined her brow like the band of some mourning head-dress. It was exactly right. She met her own eyes in the mirror, sorrowful, yet shining.

Lorely turned to face Jan.

She was ready.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

ADELE SAT IN JAN'S BIG CHAIR in the sitting-room of the flat and stared unseeingly at the pottery plate on the wall facing her.

She seemed to have been staring at it for hours.

The brandy decanter stood on the occasional table beside her. It was unstopped and half empty. The wine-red glass ash-tray, with its foolish ornament of grapes, held the stubs of six cigarettes.

All the lights were on and the dark unscreened window gave

on to the night like the black mouth of some cave. There was a quality of nightmare in the atmosphere. No amount of bright light could dispel the room's prevailing menace. Against that evil, a scream might go on for ever. . . .

Adele stirred. Clenched in her hand was a scrap of paper. It was Jan's note, written to her after the trial. She smoothed it out and read it again. "*My love,*" read Jan's firm handwriting on the creased fragment of his notebook. "*I have come to take you home.*"

Adele clenched the paper afresh. "No!" she cried aloud to the unanswering walls, "don't come! Never! never come!"

It seemed that already Adele had sat here long enough. At any moment there would be a sound, a step on the stairs, and Jan would be here. It would be too late then to run away.

She couldn't face him.

During these past few weeks, Adele had longed hourly for Jan to come, for her to be able to rest her eyes upon his familiar face, the blunt features, the kind and understanding eyes.

Jan's eyes would not judge Adele. They would still try to understand. But she could not meet them, could not account to them for the moment when Justin died or for the moment when she had stood up in the box with Jan's name upon her lips.

She had killed. Not only Justin, but herself. For Jan's love had been her life, and now she had no more right to it, as he would discover. He had only to see her, and he would know.

While she lived. . . . But she could go away, go somewhere where Jan could never follow her, could never accuse her by the silence in his grey patient eyes.

It was her own fault. Like an enormous wheel, Adele's thoughts turned and crushed her with the certainty that if she had not pitted her insensate, childish will against the forces of her destiny, she would have got Jan back. She would have got off at the trial and, after that, in spite of everything, he had come to take her home.

The minutes were ticking by. At this moment, Jan might be on his way.

The paralysis that had gripped Adele since she got home,

released her now that she had decided what to do. She got to her feet and went into the bathroom.

From the medicine cupboard, Adele took down a small medicine bottle three-parts full of some brown fluid that looked like cough mixture. It was the sleeping draught that Jan had got for her, nearly two years before. But she had slept better after Jan came.

A note on the bottle's label read, "One teaspoonful to be taken in water".

Adele went to the wash-basin and half-filled a tumbler with water. Into this she emptied the whole of the sleeping draught. Taking the tumbler with her, she went back into the bedroom.

The baby lay sleeping peacefully in his cot. Mrs. Humphries had come home with Adele and had changed him and given him his bottle. Next morning she would come again.

Adele avoided the cot. It was for Jan that she had lived, not the baby. The baby had been a means to an end, but, like everything else in her life, he had failed her.

On the table beside the bed lay a sheet of paper. On it, Mrs. Humphries had written down the proportions of the baby's six a.m. feeding bottle. A pencil lay beside the paper. Adele turned over the paper and wrote something on the back of it.

Adele was still wearing the black suit she had worn throughout the trial. She drained the sleeping draught. Fully clothed, she lay down upon the bed. Her mind was a total blank. She drew up her knees and folded her arms about them and waited for sleep. . . .

It might have been seconds, or it might have been a thousand years that Adele lay on that bed, earth-bound, while in the blessed blank of her mind, in place of sleep; the wheel turned again: crushing her over and over with the relentless knowledge that it was her own fault that she had lost Jan, that she need never have done it, that she should have waited, been patient, let herself be beaten, if need be.

Never, in any life, could she forget it: you had to take your beating.

Then it was over.

It seemed to Adele that a comforting presence was near. Friendly hands were tearing from her the grey misty cocoon that seemed to have been prisoning her so that she could not move, or wake up.

In the growing light before Adele's eyes, something took shape: it was a silver intaglio brooch, set with turquoise stones and enamelled in black . . . some of the enamel was chipped and flaking.

There was only one person in Adele's life who wore that brooch. She struggled towards it, towards the wearer, that never-failing source of love and comfort.

It was her mother.

Chapter Thirty

"JAN, THE DOOR'S OPEN."

Lorely announced it in a tone of discovery. At her tentative push, Adele's downstairs door opened widely. The hall was brightly-lighted. Someone had placed a couple of sheaves of flowers at the foot of the stairs. There were a number of telegrams on the mat.

Jan went up the stairs two at a time.

All the doors were open. All the lights were burning.

There was death in the air.

Jan did not need to be told what had happened. He went into Adele's bedroom and closed the door behind him and locked it.

She lay, in her strange posture of the unborn, almost as he had first found her, two years before. Only now, there would be no return of the spirit to this body.

Jan picked up the scrap of paper at the bedside. It seemed that there must be life, yet, in Adele's last words to him.

"*Forgive me,*" Adele had written to Jan, "*I did not love you enough.*"

Greater even than Jan's grief, an enormous sense of impotence rose up and took him by the throat as though it would

choke the life out of him. He had failed, he had not been able to save Adele.

The mound of bodies in the camp, the fury of unseen powers, and man's voice, demanding *why*?

It all came to this, "the unanswerable silence.

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed . . . or the pitcher be broken at the fountain." The pitcher was this flesh, that had housed Adele. Adele herself had smashed it, had loosed the cord, and gone.

It was not the end.

Because of Adele, Jan had learned to know himself. Because of Jan, Adele had gone to eternity, taking with her the memory of what Jan had taught her. Their memories remained.

There were other lives.

As he had accepted the spirit's final inviolability in those other bodies, Jan let Adele go. In this life, no one could save Adele, because she could not save herself.

A baby was crying.

In the room of death rose the fretful cry of the living. It was more urgent than the life that had gone.

Jan went to the cot and lifted the warm weight of his son. Clumsily, he adjusted the lolling head to the crook of his arm as the baby's mother had done. The baby's protests ceased. His dark eyes found his father's face and remained there. There were no fears in those eyes, no nightmares preying from the womb and beyond. Jan thought of Adele's nightmares, the terror of her memories. "*Please God,*" he prayed, "*be will have no memories but his own.*"

Lorely met Jan as he came out of the bedroom with the child in his arms.

She had guessed what had happened. In the softness of the large eyes she lifted to Jan there was no more sophistry, only the simple knowledge and wisdom of her peasant ancestors.

Jan answered her unspoken question.

"She's dead."

Lorely was looking at the baby. She held out her arms.

Jan gave Lorely his son.

It was as though Lorely grew heavy with the child. There

was an expression in her face that Jan had never seen there before.

It was joy.

The baby stared up at Lorely with his dark eyes that seemed to hold the wisdom of the previous worlds of his existence. His pale unflawed skin was transiently flushed. He felt solid, heavy in the bone, and he had a secret soapy smell. One of his hands moved.

Lorely did not think of the baby as being the son of Jan, or the son of Adele, or even as the person who would one day be her son.

In that moment she took him, held him, loved him, because he was himself.

